UNDER THE THUMBS OF THE GODS by **FRITZ LEIBER**
a new **fafhrd and the gray mouser** adventure!

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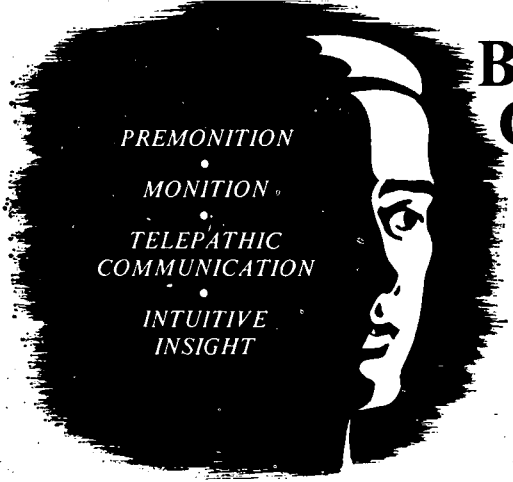

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APRIL, 1975 Vol. 24, No. 3

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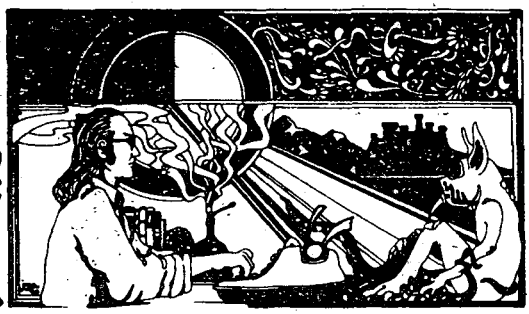
TED WHITE editorial



A NEW SUBTITLE: Beginning this issue we've changed the subtitle of this magazine. On the cover it now reads "Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy;" on the spine it reads "Swords & Sorcery and other Fantasies." In both cases the change simply underscores the recent (but not all *that* recent) shift in balance in the contents of this magazine to more fully embrace the total spectrum of fantasy.

The fact is that we've run no "pure" science fiction here in quite a while—although futuristic fantasy will continue to have a place here—and the phrase "Science Fiction & Fantasy" was really no longer appropriate.

At one time FANTASTIC published material nearly indistinguishable from that which appeared in its companion magazine, AMAZING SF. This has been less and less true in recent years, but the words "Science Fiction" remained in our subhead for one very simple reason: until the upsurge of interest in heroic fantasy (probably resulting from the popularity of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and the revival, in book form, of Howard's Conan) pure fantasy magazines were consistent losers on the newsstands.

I have no figures on the sales of *Weird Tales* in its heyday, but by the time it died in the early fifties, it had wasted into a pale shadow of its former health. By then the newsstand had already become a graveyard for the superb *Unknown* magazine (edited by John W. Campbell, Jr.) as well as for several lesser-known fantasy pulps and digest-sized magazines of the thirties and forties, most of which published only a few issues. In the mid-fifties two new attempts were made at publishing pure-fantasy magazines: *Beyond*, edited by *Galaxy*'s H. L. Gold; and *Fantasy*, edited by Fletcher Pratt and Lester del Rey. Neither survived despite their general excellence of material. In the sixties Lester del Rey tried again with *Worlds of Fantasy*, and a west-coast publisher launched *Coven 13* (which changed publishers after its initial failure and died a lingering death as *Witchcraft & Sorcery*). Robert Lowndes edited several largely-reprint magazines, the best-known of which was *The Magazine of Horror*, but even with the smallest of budgets they did not survive (nor did their publisher). *Weird Tales* was revived by Sam Moskowitz recently as a quarterly, but never received an adequate push from its publisher and has apparently folded (Sam having left it).

What does this leave us with? Precisely *two* magazines with the word "fantasy" or "fantastic" in their titles have survived over the years. The older of the two began life as *The*

(cont. on page 116)

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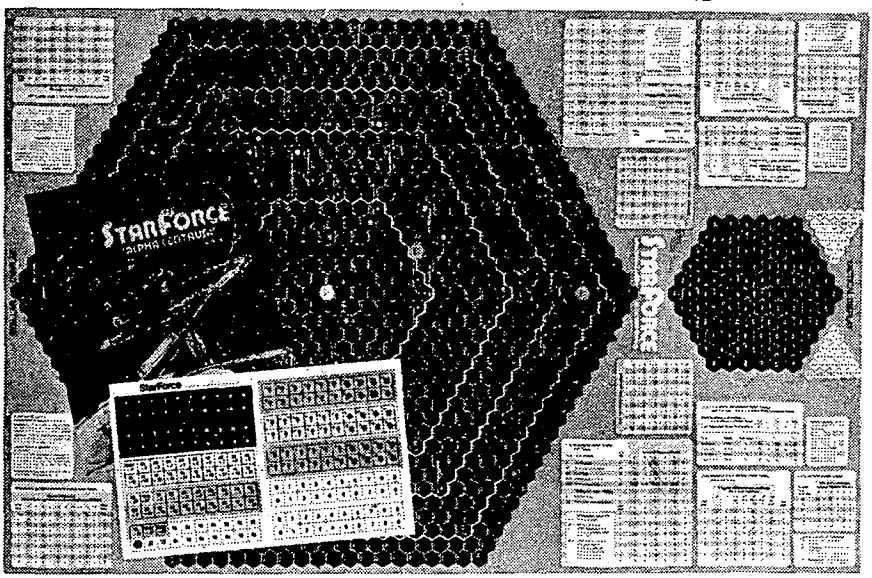

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When last glimpsed in these pages, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser found themselves "Trapped in the Shadowland" (November, 1973); still searching for amatory dalliance they are on this occasion all too firmly–

UNDER THE THUMBS OF THE GODS

FRITZ LEIBER

DRINKING STRONG DRINK one night at the Silver Eel, the Gray Mouser and Fafhrd became complacently, even luxuriously, nostalgic about their past loves and amorous exploits. They even boasted a little to each other about their most recent erotic solacings (although it is always very unwise to boast of such matters, especially out loud; one never knows who may be listening).

"Despite her vast talent for evil," the Mouser said, "Hisvet remains always a child. Why should that surprise me?—evil comes naturally to children, it is a game to them, they feel no shame. Her breasts are no bigger than walnuts, or limes, or at most small tangerines topped by hazelnuts—all eight of them."

Fafhrd said, "Frix is the very soul of the dramatic. You should have seen her poised on the battlement later that night, her eyes raptly agleam, seeking the stars. Naked save for some ornaments of copper fresh as rosy dawn. She looked as if she were about to fly—which she can do, as you know."

IN THE Land of the Gods, in short in Godsland and near Nehwon's Life Pole there, which lies in the southron hemisphere at the antipodes from the Shadowland (abode of Death), three gods sitting together cross-legged in a circle picked out Fafhrd's and the Mouser's voices from the general mutter of their worshippers, both loyal and lapsed, which resounds eternally in any god's ear, as if he held a seashell to it.

One of the three gods was Issek, whom Fafhrd had once faithfully served as acolyte for three months. Issek had the appearance of a delicate youth with wrists and ankles broken, or rather permanently bent at right angles. During his Passion he had been severely racked. Another was Kos, whom Fafhrd had revered during his childhood in the Cold Waste, rather a squat,

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brawny god bundled up in furs, with a grim, not to say surly, heavily bearded visage.

The third god was Mog, who resembled a four-limbed spider with a quite handsome, though not entirely human face. Once the girl Ivrian, the Mouser's first love, had taken a fancy to a jet statuette of Mog he had stolen for her and decided, perhaps roguishly, that Mog and the Mouser looked alike.

Now the Gray Mouser is generally believed to be and have always been complete atheist, but this is not true. Partly to humor Ivrian, whom he spoiled fantastically, but partly because it tickled his vanity that a god should choose to look like him, he made a game for several weeks of firmly believing in Mog.

So the Mouser and Fafhrd were clearly worshippers, though lapsed, and the three gods singled out their voices because of that and because they were the most noteworthy worshippers these three gods had ever had and because they were boasting. For the gods have very sharp ears for boasts, or for declarations of happiness and self-satisfaction, or for assertions of a firm intention to do this or that, or for statements that this or that must surely happen, or any other words hinting that a man is in the slightest control of his own destiny. And the gods are jealous, easily angered, perverse, and swift to thwart.

"It's them, all right—the haughty bastards!" Kos grunted, sweating under his furs—for Godsland is paradisial.

"They haven't called on me for years—the ingrates!" Issek said with a toss of his delicate chin. "We'd be dead for all they care, except we've our other worshippers. But they don't know that—they're heartless."

"They have not even taken our names in vain," said Mog. "I believe, gentlemen, it is time they suffered the divine displeasure. Agreed?"

IN THE MEANWHILE, by speaking privily of Frix and Hisvet, the Mouser and Fafhrd had aroused certain immediate desires in themselves without seriously disturbing their mood of complacent nostalgia.

"What say you, Mouser," Fafhrd mused lazily, "should we now seek excitement? The night is young."

His comrade replied grandly, "We have but to stir a little, to signify our interest, and excitement will seek us. We've loved and been forever adored by so many girls that we're bound to run into a pair of 'em. Or even two pair. They'll catch our present thoughts on the wing and come running. We will hunt girls—ourselves the bait!"

"So let's be on our way," said Fafhrd, drinking up and rising with a lurch.

"ACH, THE LEWD DOGS!" Kos

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growled, shaking sweat from his brow, for Godsland is balmy (and quite crowded). "But how to punish 'em?"

Mog said, smiling lopsidedly because of his partially arachnid jaw structure, "They seem to have chosen their punishment."

"The torture of hope!" Issek chimed eagerly, catching on. "We grant them their wishes—"

"—and then leave the rest to the girls," Mog finished.

"You can't trust women," Kos asserted darkly.

"On the contrary, my dear fellow," Mog said, "when a god's in good form, he can safely trust his worshippers, female and male alike, to do all the work. And now, gentlemen, on with our thinking caps!"

Kos scratched his thickly matted head vigorously, dislodging a louse or two.

WHIMSICALLY, and perhaps to put a few obstacles between themselves and the girls presumably now rushing toward them, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser chose to leave the Silver Eel by its kitchen door, something they'd never done once before in all their years of patronage.

The door was low and heavily bolted, and when those were shot still wouldn't budge. And the new cook, who was deaf and dumb, left off his stuffing of a calf's stomach and came over to make gobbling noises and flap his arms in gestures of protest or warning. But the Mouser pressed two bronze agols into his greasy palm while Fafhrd kicked the door open. They prepared to stride out into the dismal lot covered by the eroded ashes of the tenement where the Mouser had dwelt with Ivrian (and she and Fafhrd's equally dear Vlana had burned) and also the ashes of the wooden garden house of mad Duke Danius, which they'd once stolen and occupied for a space—the dismal and ill-omened lot which they'd never heard of anyone building on since.

But when they'd ducked their heads and gone through the doorway, they discovered that construction of a sort *had* been going on (or else that they'd always seriously underestimated the depth of the Silver Eel) for instead of on empty ground open to sky, they found themselves in a corridor lit by torches held in brazen hands along each wall.

Undaunted, they strode forward past two closed doors.

"That's Lankhmar City for you," the Mouser observed. "You turn your back and they've put up a new secret temple."

"Good ventilation, though," Fafhrd commented on the absence of smoke.

They followed the corridor around a sharp turn. . .and stopped dead. The split-level chamber facing them had surprising features. The sunken half was close-ceilinged and otherwise gave the impression of being far under-

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ground, as if its floor were not eight finger-joints deeper than the raised section but eighty yards. Its furniture was a bed with a coverlet of violet silk. A thick yellow silk cord hung through a hole in the low ceiling.

The chamber's raised half seemed the balcony or battlement of a tower thrust high above Lankhmar's smog, for stars were visible in the black upper background and ceiling.

On the bed, silver-blonde head to its foot, slim Hisvet lay prone but upthrust on her straightened arms. Her robe of fine silk, yellow as desert sunlight, was outdented by her pair of small high breasts, but depended freely from the nipples of those, leaving unanswered the question of whether there were three more pairs arranged symmetrically below.

While against starry night (or its counterfeit), her dark hair braided with scrubbed copper wire, Frix stood magnificently tall and light-footed (though motionless) in her silken robe violet as a desert's twilight before dawn.

Fafhrd was about to say, "You know, we were just talking about you," and the Mouser was about to tread on his instep for being so guileless, when Hisvet cried to the latter, "You again!—intemperate dirksman. I told you never even to *think* of another rendezvous with me for two years' space."

Frix said to Fafhrd, "Beast! I told you I played with a member of the lower orders only on *rare* occasions."

Hisvet tugged sharply on the silken cord. A heavy door dropped down in the men's faces from above and struck its sill with a great and conclusive jar.

Fafhrd lifted a finger to his nose, explaining ruefully, "I thought it had taken off the tip. Not exactly a loving reception."

The Mouser said bravely, "I'm glad they turned us off. Truly, it would have been too soon, and so a bore. On with our girl hunt!"

They returned past the mute flames held in bronze hands to the second of the two closed doors. It opened at a touch to reveal another dual chamber and in it their loves Reetha and Kreeshkra, whom only short months ago they'd been seeking near the Sea of Monster, until they were trapped in the Shadowland and barely escaped back to Lankhmar. To the left, in muted sunlight on a couch of exquisitely smoothed dark wood, Reetha reclined quite naked. Indeed, extremely naked, for as the Mouser noted, she'd kept up her habit, inculcated when she'd been slave of a finicky overlord, of regularly shaving all of herself, even her eyebrows. Her totally bare head, held at a pert angle, was perfectly shaped and the Mouser felt a surge of sweet desire. She was cuddling to her tender bosom a very emaciated-seeming but tranquil animal, which the Mouser suddenly realized was a cat, hairless save for its score of whiskers

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bristling from its mask.

To the right, in dark night a-dance with the light of campfire and on a smooth shale shore of what Fafhrd recognized to be, by the large white-bearded serpents sporting in it, the Sea of Monsters, sat his beloved Kreeshkra, more naked even than Reetha. She might have been a disquieting sight to some (naught but an aristocratically handsome skeleton), except that the flames near which she sat struck dark blue gleams from the sweetly curved surfaces of her transparent flesh casing her distinguished bones.

"Mouser, why have you come?" Reetha cried out somewhat reproachfully. "I'm happy here in Eevamarensee, where all men are as hairless by nature (our household animals too) as I am by my daily industry. I love you dearly still, but we can't live together and must not meet again. This is my proper place."

Likewise, bold Kreeshkra challenged Fafhrd with "Mud Man, avaunt! I loved you once. Now I'm a Ghoul again. Perhaps in future time. . . But now, begone!"

It was well neither Fafhrd nor Mouser had stepped across the threshold, for at those words this door slammed in their faces too, and this time stuck fast. Fafhrd forbore to kick it.

"You know, Mouser," he said thoughtfully, "We've been enamoured of some strange ones in our time. But always most intensely interesting," he hastened to add.

"Come on, come on," the Mouser enjoined gruffly. "There are other fish in the sea."

The remaining door opened easily too, though Fafhrd pushed it somewhat gingerly. Nothing startling, however, came into view this time, only a long dark room, empty of persons and furniture, with a second door at the other end. Its only novel feature was that the right-hand wall glowed green. They walked in with returning confidence. After a few steps they became aware that the glowing wall was thick crystal enclosing pale green, faintly clouded water. As they watched, continuing to stroll, there swam into view with lazy undulations two beautiful mermaids, the one with long golden hair trailing behind her and a sheathlike garb of wide-meshed golden fishnet, the other with short dark hair parted by a ridgy and serrated silver crest. They came close enough for one to see the slowly pulsing gills scoring their necks where they merged into their sloping, faintly scaled shoulders, and farther down their bodies those discrete organs wich contradict the contention, subject of many a crude jest, that a man is unable fully to enjoy an unbifurcated woman (though any pair of snakes in love tell us otherwise). They swam closer still, their dreamy eyes now wide and peering, and the Mouser and Fafhrd recognized the two queens of the sea they had embraced

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some years past while deep diving from their sloop *Black Treasurer*.

What the wide-peering fishy eyes saw evidently did not please the mermaids, for they made faces and with powerful flirts of their long finny tails retreated away from the crystal wall through the greenish water, whose cloudiness was increased by their rapid movements, until they could no longer be seen.

Turning to the Mouser, Fafhrd inquired, eyebrows alift, "You mentioned other fish in the sea?"

With a quick frown the Mouser strode on. Trailing him, Fafhrd mused puzzledly, "You said this might be a secret temple, friend. But if so, where are its porters, priests, and patrons other than ourselves?"

"More like a museum—scenes of distant life. And a piscesium, or piscatorium," his comrade answered curtly over shoulder.

"I've also been thinking," Fafhrd continued, quickening his steps, "there's too much space here we've been walking through for the lot behind the Silver Eel to hold. What *has* been builded here?—or there?"

The Mouser went through the far door. Fafhrd was close behind.

In Godsland Kos snarled, "The rogues are taking it too easily. Oh, for a thunderbolt!"

Mog told him rapidly, "Never you fear, my friend, we have them on the run. They're only putting up appearances. We'll wear them down by slow degrees until they pray to us for mercy, groveling on their knees. That way our pleasure's greater."

"Quieter, you two," Issek shrilled, waving his bent wrists, "I'm getting another girl pair!"

It was clear from these and other quick gesticulations and injunctions—and from their rapt yet tense expressions—that the three gods in close inward-facing circle were busy with something interesting. From all around other divinities large and small, baroque and classical, noisome and beautiful, came drifting up to comment and observe. Godsland *is* overcrowded, a veritable slum, all because of man's perverse thirst for variety. There are rumors among the packed gods there of other and (perish the thought!) superior gods, perhaps invisible, who enjoy roomier quarters on another and (oh woe!) higher level and who (abysmal deviltry!) even hear thoughts, but nothing certain.

Issek cried out in ecstacy, "There, there, the stage is set! Now to search out the next teasing pair. Kos and Mog, help me. Do your rightful share."

The Gray Mouser and Fafhrd felt they'd been transported to the mysterious realm of Quarmall, where they'd had one of their most fantastic adventures. For the next chamber seemed a cave in solid rock, given room-shape by laborious chipping. And behind a

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table piled with parchments and scrolls, inkwells and quills, sat the two saucy, seductive slavegirls they'd rescued from the cavern-world's monotonies and tortures: slender Ivivis, supple as a snake, and pleasantly plump Friska, light of foot. The two men felt relief and joy that they'd come home to the familiar and beloved.

Then they saw the room had windows, with sunlight suddenly striking in (as if a cloud had lifted), and was not solid rock but morticed stone, and that the girls wore not the scanty garb of slaves but rich and sober robes, while their faces were grave and self-reliant.

Ivivis looked up at the Mouser with inquiry but instant disapproval. "What dost here, figment of my servile past? 'Tis true, you rescued me from Quarmall foul. For which I paid you with my body's love. Which ended at Tovilysis when we split. We're quits, dear Mouser, yes by Mog, we are!" (She wondered why she used that particular oath.)

Likewise Friska looked at Fafhrd and said, "That goes for you too, bold barbarian. You also killed my lover Hovis, you'll recall—as Mouser did Ivivis' Klevis. We are no longer simple-minded slaves, playthings of men, but subtile secretary and present treasurer of the Guild of Free Women at Tovilyis. We'll never love again unless I choose—which I do not today! And so, by Kos and Issek, now begone!" (She wondered likewise why she invoked those particular deities, for whom she had no respect whatever.)

These rebuffs hurt the two heroes sorely, so that they had not the spirit to respond with denials, jests, or patient gallantries. Their tongues clove to their hard palates, their hearts and privates grew chilly, they almost cringed —and they rather swiftly stole from that chamber by the open door ahead. . .into a large room shaped of bluish ice, or rock of the same hue and translucence and as cold, so that the flames dancing in the large fireplace were welcome. Before this was spread a rug looking wondrously thick and soft, about which were set scatteredly jars of unguents, small bottles of perfume (which made themselves known by their ranging scents), and other cosmetic containers and tools. Furthermore, the invitingly textured rug showed indentations as if made by two recumbent human forms, while about a cubit above it floated two living masks as thin as silk or paper or more thin, holding the form of wickedly pretty, pert girl faces, the one rosy mauvette, the other turquoise green.

Others would have deemed it a prodigy, but the Mouser and Fafhrd at once recognized Keyaira and Hirriwi, the invisible frost princesses with whom they'd once been separately paired for one long, long night in Stardock, tallest of Nehwon's northron peaks,

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and knew that the two gaysome girls were reclining unclad in front of the fire and had been playfully annointing each other's faces with pigmented salves.

Then the turquoise mask leapt up betwixt Fafhrd and the fire, so that dancing orange flames only shone through its staring eye holes and between its now cruel and amused lips as it spoke to him, saying "In what frowsty bed are you now dead asleep, gross one-time lover, that your squeaking soul can be blown halfway accross the world to gape at me? Some day again climb Stardock and in your solid form importune me. I might hark. But now, phantom, depart!"

The mallow mask likewise spoke scornfully to the Mouser, saying in tones as stinging and impelling as the flames seen through its facial orifices, "And you remove too, wraith most pitiful. By Khahkht of the Black Ice and Gara of the Blue—and e'en Kos of the Green—I enjoin it! Blow winds! And out lights all!"

Fafhrd and the Mouser were hurt even more sorely by these new rebuffs. Their very souls were shriveled by the feeling that they were indeed the phantoms, and the speaking masks the solid reality. Nevertheless, they might have summoned the courage to attempt to answer the challenge (though 'tis doubtful), except that at Keyaira's last commands they were plunged into darkness absolute and manhandled by great winds and then dumped in a lighted area. A wind-slammed door crashed shut behind them.

They saw with considerable relief that they were not confronting yet another pair of girls (*that* would have been unendurable) but were in another stretch of corridor lit by clear-flaming torches held in brazen wall-brackets in the form of gripping bird-talons, coiling squid-tentacles, and pinching crab-claws. Grateful for the respite, they took deep breaths.

Then Fafhrd frowned deeply and said, "Mark me, Mouser, there's magic somewhere in all this. Or else the hand of a god."

The Mouser commented bitterly, "If it's a god, he's a thumb-fingered one, the way he sets us up to be turned down."

Fafhrd's thoughts took a new tack, as shown by the changing furrows in his forehead. "Mouser, I never squeaked," he protested. "Hirriwi said I squeaked."

"Manner of speaking only, I suppose," his comrade consoled. "But gods! what misery I felt myself, as if I were no longer man at all, and *this* no more than broomstick." He indicated his sword Scalpel at his side and gazed with a shake of his head at Fafhrd's scabbarded Graywand.

"Perchance we dream—" Fafhrd began doubtfully.

"Well, if we're dreaming, let's get on with it," the Mouser said and clapping his friend around the shoulders, started them down the

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corridor. Yet despite these cheerful words and actions, both men felt they were getting more and more into the toils of nightmare, drawing them on will-lessly.

They rounded a turn. For some yards the right-hand wall became a row of slender dark pillars, irregularly spaced, and between them they could see more random dusky slim shafts and at middle distance a long altar on which light showered softly down, revealing a tall, naked woman stretched on it, and by her a priestess in purple robes with dagger bared in one hand and large silver chalice in the other, who was intoning a litany.

Fafhrd whispered, "Mouser! the sacrifice is the courtesan Lessnya, with whom I had some dealings when I was acolyte of Issek, years ago."

"While the other is Ilala, priestess of the like-named goddess, with whom I had some commerce when I was lieutenant to Pulg the extortioner," the Mouser whispered back.

Fafhrd protested, "But we *can't* have already come all the way to the temple of Ilala, though this looks like it. It's halfway across Lankhmar from the Eel," while the Mouser recalled tales he'd heard of secret passages in Lankhmar that connected points by distances shorter than the shortest distance between.

Ilala turned toward them in her purple robes and said with eyebrows raised, "Quiet back there! You are committing sacrilege, trespassing on most holy ritual of the great goddess of all shes. Impious intruders, depart!" While Lessnya lifted on an elbow and looked at them haughtily. Then she lay back again and regarded the ceiling while Ilala plunged her dagger deep into her chalice and then with it flicked sprinkles of wine (or whatever other fluid the chalice held) on Lessnya's naked shape, wielding the blade as if it were as aspergillum. She aspersed her thrice—on bosom, loins, and knees—and then resumed her muttered litany, while Lessnya echoed her (or else snored) and the Mouser and Fafhrd stole on along the torchlit corridor.

But they had little time to ponder on the strange geometries and stranger religiosities of their nightmare progress, for now the left-hand wall gave way for a space to a fabulously decorated, large, dim chamber, which they recognized as the official residence room of the Grandmaster of the Thieves' Guild in Thieves' House, half Lankhmar City back again from Ilala's fane. The foreground was filled with figures kneeling away from them in devout supplication toward a thick-topped ebony table, behind which there stood queenly tall a handsome red-haired woman dressed in jewels and behind her a trim second female in maid's black tunic collared and cuffed with white.

" 'Tis Ivlis in her beauty from the past, for whom I stole

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Ohmphal's erubescent fingertips," the Mouser whispered in stupefaction. "And now she's got herself a peck more gems."

"And that is Freg, her maid, looking no older," Fafhrd whispered back hoarsely in dream-drugged wonderment.

"But what's she doing here in Thieves' House?" the Mouser pressed, his whisper feverish, "where women are forbidden and contemned. As if *she* were grandmaster of the Guild. . . grand-mistress. . .goddess worshipped. . . Is Thieves' Guild upside down?. . .all Nehwon turvy-topsy. . .?"

Ivlis looked up at them across the heads of her kneeling followers. Her green eyes narrowed. She casually lifted her fingers to her lips, then flicked them sideways twice, indicating to the Mouser that he should silently keep going in that direction and not return.

With a slow unloving smile, Freg made exactly the same gesture to Fafhrd, but even more idly seeming, as if humming a chorus. The two men obeyed, but with their gazes trailing behind them, so that it was with complete surprise, almost with starts of fear, that they found they had walked blindly into a room of rare woods embellished with intricate carvings, with a door before them and doors to either side, and in the one of the latter nearest the Mouser a freshly nubile girl with wicked eyes, in a green robe of shaggy toweling cloth, her black hair moist, and in the one nearest Fafhrd two slim blondes a-smile with dubious merriment and wearing loosely the black hoods and robes of nuns of Lankhmar. In nightmare's fullest grip they realized that this was the very same garden house of Duke Danius, haunted by their earliest deepest loves, impiously reconstituted from the ashes to which the sorcerer Sheelba had burned it and profanely refurbished with all the trinkets wizard Ningauble had magicked from it and scattered to the four winds, and that these three nightfillies were Ivmiss Ovartamortes, niece of Karstak like-named, Lankhmar's then overlord, and Fralek and Fro, mirror-twin daughters of the death-crazed duke, the three she-colts of the dark to whom they'd madly turned after losing even the ghosts of their true loves in Shadowland. Fafhrd was wildly thinking in unvoiced sound, "Fralek and Fro, and Freg, Friska and Frix—what is this Fr'-charm on me?" while through the Mouser's mind was skipping likewise, "Ivlis, Ivmiss, Ivivis (*two* Iv's—and there's e'en an Iv in Hisvet)—who are these girl-lets of the Iv. . .?"

(Near the Life Pole, the gods Mog, Issek, and Kos were working at the top of their bent, crying out to each other new girl-discoveries with which to torment their lapsed worshippers. The crowd of spectator gods around

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them was now large.)

And then the Mouser bethought him with a shiver that he had not listed amongst his girl-lings of the Iv the archgirl of them all, fair Ivrian, forever lost in Death's demesne. And Fafhrd likewise shook. And the nightfillies flanking them pouted and made moues at them, and they were fairly catapulted into the midst of a pavilion of wine-dark silk, beyond whose unstirring folds showed the flat black horizons of the Shadowland.

Beauteous, slate-visaged Vlana spat full in Fafhrd's face, saying, "I told you I'd do that if you came back," but fair Ivrian only eyed the Mouser with never a sign or word.

And then they were back in the betorched corridor, more hurried along it than hurrying, and the Mouser envied Fafhrd death's spittle inching down his cheek. And girls were flashing by like ghosts, unheedingly—Mara of Fafhrd's youth, Atya who worshipped Tyaa, bovine-eyed Hrenlet, Ahura of Seleucia, and many many more—until they were feeling the utter despair that comes with being rejected not by one or a few loves, but by all. The unfairness of it alone was enough to make a man die.

Then in the rush one scene lingered awhile: Alyx the Picklock garbed in the scarlet robes and golden tiara a-swarm with rubies of the archpriest of an eastern faith, and kneeling before her costumed as clerk Lilyblack, the Mouser's girlish leman from his criminous days, intoning, "Papa, the heathen rage, the civilized decay," and the transvestite archpriestess pronouncing, "All men are enemies. . ."

Almost Fafhrd and the Mouser dropped to their knees and prayed to whatever gods may be for surcease from their torment. But somehow they didn't, and of a sudden they found themselves on Cheap Street near where it crosses Crafts and turning in at a drab doorway after two females, whose backs were teasingly familiar, and following them up a narrow flight of stairs that stretched up so far in one flight that its crazy warpage was magnified.

In Godsland Mog threw himself back, blowing out his breath and saying, "There! that gets them all," while Issek likewise stretched himself out (so far as his permanently bent ankles and wrists would permit), observing, "Lord, people don't appreciate how we gods work, what toil in sparrow-watching!" and the spectator gods began to disperse.

But Kos, still frowningly immersed in his task to such a degree that he wasn't aware of the pain in his short burly thighs from sitting cross-legged so long, cried out, "Hold on! here's another pair: to wit, one Nemia of the Dusk, one Eyes of Ogo, women of lax morals and, to boot, receivers of stolen property—oh, that's vile!"

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Issek laughed wearily and said, "Quit now, dear Kos. I crossed those two off at the very start. They're our men's dearest enemies, swindled them out of a precious loot of jewels, as almost any god around could tell you. Sooner than seek them out (to be rebuffed in any case, of course) our boys would rot in hell," while Mog yawned and added, "Don't you ever know, dear Kos, when the game's done?"

So the befurred short god shrugged and gave over, cursing as he tried to straighten his legs.

Meanwhile, the Eyes of Ogo and Nemia of the Dusk reached the summit of the endless stairs and tiredly entered their pad, eyeing it with disfavor. (It *was* an impoverished, dingy, even noisome place—the two best thieves in Lankhmar had fallen on hard times, as even the best of thieves and receivers will in the course of long careers.)

Nemia turned round and said, "Look what the cat dragged in." Hardship had drastically straightened her lush curves. Her comrade Ogo-Eyes still looked somewhat like a child, but a very old and ill-used one. "Wow," she said wearily, "you two look miserable, as if you'd just 'scaped death and sorry you had. Do yourselves a favor—fall down the stairs, breaking your necks."

When Fafhrd and the Mouser didn't move, or change their woebegone expressions, she laughed shortly, dropped into a broken-seated chair, poked out a leg at the Mouser, and said, "Well, if you're not leaving, make yourself useful. Remove my sandals, wash my feet," while Nemia sat down before a ricketty dressing table and while surveying herself in the broken mirror, held out a broken-toothed instrument in Fafhrd's direction, saying, "Comb my hair, barbarian. Watch out for snarls and knots."

Fafhrd and the Mouser (the latter preparing and fetching warm water) began solemn-faced to do those very things most carefully.

After quite a long time (and several other menial sevices rendered, or servile penances done) the two women could no longer keep from smiling. Misery, *after* it's comforted, loves company. "That's enough for now," Eyes told the Mouser. "Come, make yourself comfortable." Nemia spoke likewise to Fafhrd, adding, "Later you men can make the dinner and go out for wine."

After awhile the Mouser said, "By Mog, this is more like it." Fafhrd agreed. "By Issek, yes. Kos damn all spooked adventures."

The three gods, hearing their names taken in vain as they rested in paradise from their toils, were content.

—FRITZ LEIBER

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DANCE

BARRY N. MALZBERG

Herewith Barry Malzberg again demonstrates his ability to encapsulate insight into the human condition within a short, concentrated, intensely controlled observation . . .

I

HELMER CALLS IN downshift when the international lines are again open. "Things are going well," he says, "we are moving toward the front. If plans are successful we will occupy the capitol by nightfall and in two more shifts the war will be over. They are breaking before us. I love you," he says. International tells him that the time is over. "Remember that," he says and disconnects, the sound in the line discord in the darkness.

I have said nothing to him. Nothing, but then what can be said? Helmer calls needing only the knowledge that I am there to listen. He has not seen me for forty shifts. We have known one another only through the international. Nevertheless, I believe that he loves me. Certainly I love him.

II

IN THE MORNING instructionals. "I love you," I say to Edge the control robot. "I want you desperately. Take me. I am of age. Union between woman and robot is now approved." I fall upon the highly suggestible Edge, sobbing, but in a cold abcess of the mind I feel a certain doubt. Doubt that I love him as much as I do Helmer.

III

SO AFTER A WHILE the supervisors come. Edge has backed away from me his little wheels spinning on an oiled patch. "Be calm," he says, "help will arrive in a moment. Do not come after me. If you do I will have to use force."

"I don't care," I say, "I love you." But I do not advance. I remain in place, running my hands rather idly through my attractive hair. "Take me," I say to make conversation. "You must."

"I cannot. I am a robot. There can be no feeling between us."

"It's permitted," I repeat rather sullenly. The supervisors enter the room: two robots, a human. They seize me with gentle hands. "I love him," I say to them. "I do."

"The girl is distraught," Edge says, "she made advances upon me. I lent her no encouragement." His circuits hum; he ges-

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tures vigorously. "I summoned assistance at once," he says. "I did not break the codes. I have no desire for her. I would not—"

"It's all right," one of the supervisory robots says. "You acted correctly. She will be dealt with." They exchange a look of perfect understanding: robot to robot. I am taken unresisting from the room. The human technician, hand to mouth, conceals his awe at my beauty.

IV

I AM TAKEN to a small cubicle where, after a suitable interval, I talk to an old man who is member of the medical staff. Human. "There is no need to feel embarassed," he says. "Have no shame at your breakdown."

"I have no shame. I love Edge."

"You are a young girl, eighteen last month, beginning to struggle with desires you cannot yet understand. In time you will gain control. Your betrothed will return to satisfy you."

"You understand nothing."

"We understand everything," the old man says. "We have full access to the tapes here, we can research and retrieve background instantaneously. We know everything about you."

"No you do not," I say. I realize that I am being stubborn and abrasive but he too is stunned by my beauty and I know that I can say anything I wish. "You cannot penetrate my heart."

"Helmer is with the conquest and you have no outlet for those very normal desires which I might add could never be satisfied by a robot, not even a control. Accordingly you have turned inward in your frustration and are having a mild psychotic reaction, what we call a disassociative phenomenon. Fugue and emotional lability is common. But you have nothing to fear and we will not retaliate. The control robot acted properly and it will all end here. Besides," he says after a little pause, "you know you do not love him."

"But I could. I could and I almost love him and you understand nothing."

The old man shakes his head. "The conquest is virtually complete," he says. "Within the fortnight the Tudors will have been smashed, the sectors overwhelmed. The troops will return. Your young man will return and he will be with you and all will be perfectly normal."

His fingers twitch, he stirs from the desk. "We will forget this incident," he says, "we will purge it from our minds and our hearts and our bodies. You are excused from the instructions for the remainder of this period. Perhaps even for the entire shift. Would you like that? The robot will be reconditioned, his memory tapes will be excised for this one event and all will be as it has been. You may even," he says with a wink, "receive another communication from your young man. You never

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know. We will see."

"No," I say, "I do not want to hear from him."

"Do you love him?"

"I love him but I love Edge too. I love everyone."

The old man shakes his head. "The conquest was unavoidable," he says, "but we knew the price that young women would pay for all of this. We—"

"If all I can see are robots and old men then I love them. I love you too," I say. I confront him wholly and he gasps as he sees the form my breasts take as I inhale. I contrive certain angles to excite. "I love you," I say again. "More than Edge, even. *Much* more than Helmer. Why don't you accept it?"

"Please," he says, his demeanor not breaking although I can understand his struggle. He wishes to vault from behind the desk and ravish me but is held by strict control. "Please don't be ridiculous. Soon we will return to a period of normality and you will see how silly you have been."

"I am not silly," I say. I know that in one instant he will leap from the desk and take me and I can hardly control my anticipation. "I am speaking the truth. You know that it is the truth."

I reach toward him, touch his hands. The contact is strange; it sends shift through me and in that instant of contact there is an altered perspective in what I see; he looks different to say nothing of the room. I run my hands up to his shoulders, hold him then. "Take me," I say, "you know I love you."

He slaps my hands down suddenly, painfully. "I will have to tell you the truth," he says. "This has gone too far and is becoming ridiculous. Do not force me to tell you the truth."

"The truth is you love me," I say. I raise my hands again and he shudders back. For the first time it occurs to me that he may not really desire me. It does not matter. I love him. I love him. "Touch me," I say.

"I'm sorry," he says, his face breaks open, from its numerous crevices pours an infinite sadness like sweat. "I will have to tell you this."

Something in his tone alters me and I fall back in the chair.

V

"THERE IS NO conquest," the old man says, "there is no absence of young men, there is no instute. Nor are there any instuctionals. You are in a very special situation, one which has been prepared by some wise men for young people of your type. In older times facilities and understanding of your condition were lacking and people like you were doomed to live unhappy and unfulfilled. Now we have evolved different methods which will give you a chance. It is possible that you will not always be this way."

"That is a lie. You are lying to me."

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"Indeed not," he says regretfully, "I wish I were. No, we have cued in false memories, artificial circumstance. The truth of your condition would be so painful that the knowledge would destroy you."

"Lies," I say again. Hoping for the truth I have found falsification, I cannot express my dismay. Still, I know the power that my breasts have to move him. Although his speech simulates control he is actually quite agitated. "Look at me," I say, "look at me. You know you want me."

"Breakthroughs," he whispers, "we have already made breakthroughs of a most significant kind. Now you have accepted your sexuality. This is meaningful; it is one of the signs for which we have been waiting." Involuntarily his hands clutch. I laugh at him. They retract like Edge's rolling joints. "Stop it," he says.

"No breakthroughs," I say. "Only lies. You have always lied to me."

"Never," he says. "We have only held back knowledge; there are still facts which you cannot bear, you have now been told only that part of the truth which you can assimilate. Later there will be more. Return to your cubicle. You are beginning to exceed your limitations."

"Lies," I say. "Touch me." I reach to expose my breasts and he looks at me with slavering fascination, then away. I run my hands over the material which covers them. "You disgust me," I say. "I no longer love you. Now you will never touch me."

"Never," he agrees. He nods, little spots palpate on his face. He lifts a hand in a gesture, I turn to see the supervisors. "You must go," he says.

"I refuse to go. You will never touch me."

His eyes dilate, he wheezes. I fling myself upon him, hurling my weight against him and he topples, helpless, to the slick floor beneath. I can feel the little lump of his erection. "You want me," I say, "I know you want me," and this is true; in the depths of his body I feel the need at dead-center. He arches toward me. His little face fills with astonishment, he starts to pump.

The supervisors pull me from him and as I rise like a flower I can see him scrambling like an insect on the floor. "Get her away from me," he cries, "get her away," and unresisting I go, I smile, I submit gratefully to the grasp of the supervisors because I have proven my point and now he knows the power which I possess. Carried through the hallways, momentarily at peace, I feel nothing in the touch which surrounds to excite me but it is as if all the way back to quarters I can hear his cries.

VI

LATER HELMER CALLS. He mentions that he has heard reports of my behavior. "Don't worry," he

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says, "it means nothing, what has happened means nothing, the conquest has taken me away but I will return and in the meantime you must be strong. Be strong and I will replace that strength with seed," and his voice shrinks and fades then like the body of the doctor, something happens to the connection, his voice implodes with a hiss and I hold the dead transceiver against my breasts, feeling the little warm fibers track their way through, the cold radiating, driving spikes then and for a long time I stand that way, around me what might be sounds but then again perhaps it is silent and I am dreaming all of this, even my love for Helmer who, of course, has always been paramount in my consciousness.

VII

AND SHORTLY THEN, inflamed by new and distant reports of the failure of the armies, I attack the robot Edge with my fists and driven by passion to great strength reduce him to wires which I bite frantically until the helpful supervisors come again.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

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EMPTYING THE PLATE

ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Ross Rocklynne has had a career in stf which spans more than four decades and is still going strong (he was in Again, Dangerous Visions*). Now he returns to this magazine after a long absense with a story which is delightfully reminiscent of the stories which appeared in our forerunner,* FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, *some twenty-five years ago–a story about a man whose life has been in some inexplicable fashion dominated by a nursery rhyme and who finds himself locked into the endless repetition of a single day . . . unless he can find the answer to an ageless riddle and free himself . . .*

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

JOEL, his fingers making cautious allowances around the paper cup of hot coffee, stopped on the way out of the wine-shop. He turned back to the store proprietor. "What was that again, Bill? You said?"

"Oh." The store proprietor was mopping up around the coffee urn with a scrap of turkish towel held in a large, perspiring hand. He looked inquiringly and good-naturedly at Joel, then: "I was just wondering if you'd mind shutting the door. If you don't mind."

Joel said slowly, "That's what I thought you said. That's funny. When I came out of my apartment a few minutes ago I had this peculiar compulsion to 'buckle my shoe.' Now you tell me to 'shut the door.' You know, like in the old nursery rhyme. It is mighty funny." He did laugh. Bill smiled vacantly.

"Yeah," he said.

Joel shut the door. Of course it was funny. First he buckled his shoe, and then, second, he shut the door.

"One, two
Buckle your shoe.

"Three, four
Shut the door."

"It was really funny," said Joel as he and Cathy drove up the Brunswick hill into South Pasadena that evening. "You see, I got up this morning, and I had this funny compulsion to put my brown buckle shoes on. Then I had the compulsion to leave one of the shoes unbuckled, so that after I got outside my apartment I had to stoop over and buckle it, like in the nursery rhyme.

"Then Bill—he owns the wine-shop down the street where I buy

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a cup of coffee in the morning—*he* asks me to 'shut the door.' "

Cathy was at the wheel of her new red Torino convertible, and she and Joel were headed for her house on St. Albans Avenue, where Cathy was going to fix him some coffee and pancakes. She was an attentive, happy little girl with blue-black waterfall hair, Clara Bow lips, and a very snappy manner. She was wearing a red and green pantsuit with a long-collared white blouse. She stopped the car, one red sandal pressing on the brake, the motor still running. They were in the middle of the Brunswick hill, her foot on the brake to keep the car from rolling back. "Well, there they are," she said in her chorded voice. "In the road ahead."

"There they are what?"

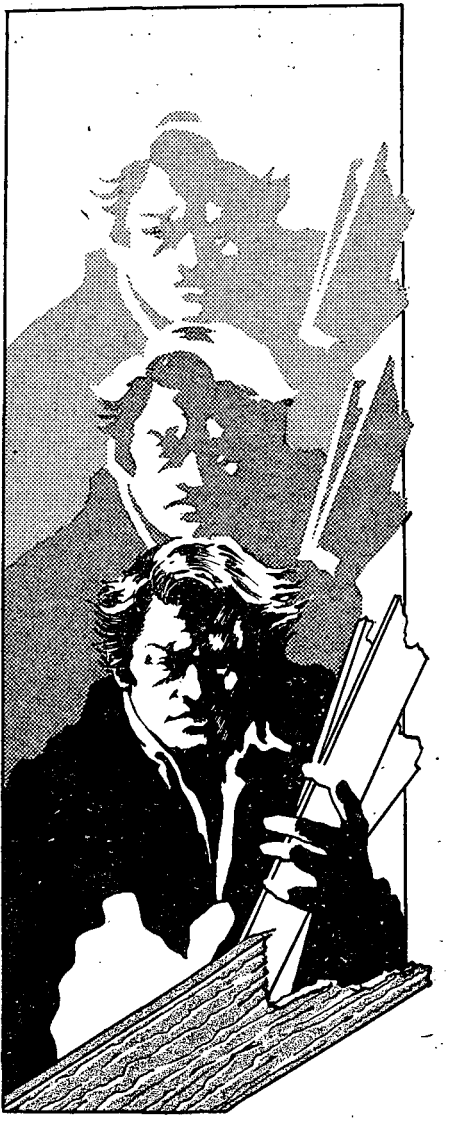
"The sticks."

Joel closed his eyes. "Oh, no," he said.

"Oh, yes. Five, six, pick up sticks. So you have to pick them up, right?" She smiled at him in moonlight. "I agree," she acknowledged. "It is funny."

Joel got out of the car and approached the "sticks." They were floorboards, apparently of white oak, and they were four inches wide, and anywhere from ten to fourteen feet long. There were a pile of them, pointing in several directions, and they had probably slipped off somebody's truck.

Joel studied them. Then he picked up several and put them at



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an angle in the back of the open convertible.

"They're floorboards," he told Cathy. "They just might be a hazard if we leave them here. Besides, somebody could run over them and wreck them. Tomorrow we'll find out who they belong to."

"That's right," said Cathy. "Pick up the sticks."

"Consider yourself TK'd," he told her sourly. Joel Bravura de Tona was a junior sports announcer for TV-KNIT, pronounced KNIGHT, but of late years he was unused to sports or any physical activity. He made five trips, put all the floorboards in the back of the convertible, and then, panting just a little, got back into the front seat with Cathy.

A door opened on the porch of a house sitting behind a chain-link fence. Joel turned his head toward the light. A woman was outlined in the light.

"What's going on there?" she called. "What's going on? What are you doing?"

Joel muttered to Cathy, "Go on, give her the gun, let's get out of here!" She gave it the gun. "I'll be damned if I'm going to unload them after loading them. I'll come down tomorrow morning and ask if anybody lost any floorboards."

"We've got a red car," said Cathy, whistling under her breath. "Wowie!"

"Tomorrow we'll find out, but I'm tired tonight," said Joel. "I didn't want to leave them in the middle of the road, you know. A definite hazard."

"Five, six, pick up sticks," she said.

He leaned over and kissed her while she drove. "Don't press me too far, kiddo," he said. "I'll knock you for a home run."

JOEL WAS WATCHING a Thursday night basketball game on the color television set. He liked the way his competitor, Larsen Tallman, never missed a beat in describing the play. Cathy was drumming together some pancakes in the adjoining kitchen. The Lakers were ahead. The score was 70-64. Jimmy Walkers of the Detroit Pistons was under the basket racing after a loose ball. The crowd was on the edge of its seats, and Larsen Tallman's voice was rising in excitement. All this sound, coming from the television set, and from Cathy whipping up the pancake mix, was not enough to muffle the tromp of rather heavily shod feet approaching the door down the garden path.

Then, a determined knock on the door.

"I'll get it," said Cathy, hurriedly.

"No, I'd better," said Joel. "Who would it be, you know?"

"Not at this hour," said Cathy. They arrived at the door at the same time.

It was the police. Cathy's breath let out in a sigh.

"I knew it," she said.

The eyes of one of the young

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officers flicked her way as he heard this.

"I am Officer Smithson," he said, and extended a gloved hand toward his partner. "This is my partner, Officer Craig. We regret the necessity of disturbing you at this hour. We are checking out a burglary report. Perhaps you can assist us."

His eyes, a calm blue, were flicking past their shoulders into the tiled living room. Joel exchanged glances with Cathy. She shrugged. Officer Smithson's eyes came back to Joel. "May I ask," he said politely, "if you own the red Torino convertible in the driveway?"

"I own it," said Cathy.

"You were driving, and this gentleman was with you?"

"That is correct," said Cathy.

The officer looked at a slip of paper in his hand. "We have a report," he said slowly, "that some floorboards were placed in a red car at 2024 Brunswick Avenue not more than thirty minutes ago. The boards were stacked against the inside wall of an open garage—"

Joel exploded. "Look, officer! Those boards were in the middle of the road! They were a definite hazard! They weren't in any garage! They were scattered all over! I put them in the Torino, with the intention—"

Officer Smithson sighed, and held up a hand.

"It would seem," he said stiffly, "that a man of your prudence would recognize that the hazard lay in driving off with them. May we come in?"

Joel growled, but after a moment Cathy flicked her shoulder and swung the door wide. The officers looked around. Officer Smithson stood looking at a glass gun case set on a ledge against a wall of the living room.

"That's quite a weapon," he said.

"That's right," said Cathy, lounging on one hip, and with a well-known look of resentment building up in her Clara Bow lips. She said: "It's a 12-gauge, 28-inch barrel Browning Superposed Grade 1 Standard. Eight efficient pounds of blue and checkered steel, suitable for murdering rats or men."

"With a box of shells and a recoil pad," said Officer Smithson, dryly. "You seem to know something about weapons, miss."

"Some," drawled Cathy. "My father and I hunted together when he was alive. I could use it if I had to."

Officer Smithson looked at her, then turned away.

"A murderous weapon," he commented, and turned back toward Joel. Joel was half listening to the basketball game, half-reviewing in his mind a rather weary replay of the situation.

"Now you have my full and total confession," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

Officer Smithson stood looking at him, and then permitted him-

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self the barest smile.

"I don't feel we should escalate the matter," he said. "Under the circumstances, however, I must ask you to return the boards yourself. Will you do so?"

Joel's breath blew out. "I'll get my coat," he said. "Cathy, hold the coffee, and let me have the keys."

DREARILY, Joel trudged past the pool and up the rock steps to the driveway. Followed by the patrol car, he drove down the hill to the Brunswick address, where he got out of the convertible, and stood bathed in the lights of the patrol car. Blinking, he saw a woman standing in an open gateway of the chain-link fence. A trifle up the hill from the house, near the Torino, was a garage in which a white Ford pick-up truck stood.

The officers approached the woman, and stood talking with her lowly. Joel stood uncomfortably. Officer Smithson walked back up to Joel.

"No difficulty," he said, and he was smiling again. "She'd like you to put them back in the garage—"

"*Back* in the garage? Now wait a minute, Officer—"

"Yes?"

Joel said loudly, "I would like the lady to understand that these boards were lying in the road, and were not taken out of her garage. To infer that I—"

"I beg your pardon," Officer Smithson interjected. "Since the car is already parked in front of the garage, and since there are other similar boards stacked along the garage wall, and since Ms. Camkin has stated she will prefer no charges—"

"But, officer, I would like it definitely understood that—"

Officer Smithson shifted on his feet.

"Just put the boards in the garage," he snapped. "I told you I didn't want to escalate this matter, didn't I? What are you trying to do?"

Joel looked at him a second. He swallowed. He took up an armful of boards and dropped them on the stacked boards in the garage.

Mrs. Camkin, a woman with piled, henna-red hair, was walking up the hill, drawing a feathery robe over her stuffed figure.

"Please lay them straight," she told Joel nervously. "My husband doesn't know the police are here or that they found the thief, but he wouldn't be nearly as easy on you."

Joel had another armful of boards. He laughed suddenly. He grinned at the woman, and recited:

"Seven, eight
Lay them straight.

"Ma'am," he added, "don't worry, I'll lay them straight, I don't have any choice, it looks like. Sorry this had to happen."

"We all make mistakes," she said. "If you'll just lay them straight, I'm sure—"

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The door to the house opened, however. A bullish man came out, shrugging a robe over his pajamas. He was muttering to himself. "Where is that s.o.b.?" he asked.

Mrs. Camkin went down the hill toward him. "Walter, it's perfectly all right," she said. "We found the thief. Please don't get upset."

"Who's getting upset? I'm just gonna tell that s.o.b. off."

Joel, coming from the garage to the car for another load, tried to avoid him. The man grabbed him by the arm, and Joel ducked.

"Hey," he said.

The man swung at him. His fist connected with Joel's jaw. Joel thrust up an arm in defense, knocking the man backward. Since the man, presumably Mr. Camkin, was below Joel on the slope, he lost his balance and fell. He rolled six feet down the hill, his robe opening up over his wrinkled pajamas. Joel started to appeal to Officer Smithson, but both officers were helping Camkin to his feet. At this point, Mrs. Camkin flew at Joel, squawking.

"You didn't have to hit him," she squawked. She began beating at his face with hands like wings. Joel protected himself by crossing his arms over his face. Mrs. Camkin, henna-haired and clucking angrily, sounded very much like a—like a—like a *what?*

The thought, important as it seemed, somehow was lost.

Mr. Camkin, panting and disheveled, broke loose from the supporting hands of the two officers and pointed up the hill. "Officers," he said, "I want you to arrest that man for beating up my wife. I might have let him get by with stealing my floorboards—"

Joel was backing up from Mrs. Camkin, still protecting himself. Finally, she let up on him, and stood glaring. Joel breathed heavily. Then he said clearly, "Mr. Camkin, I hope you can understand I did not harm your wife, and I did not steal your boards. What probably happened was, they slipped off your pick-up truck and you just didn't notice. I came by not long after that—and there was this thing about picking up sticks. Five, six, pick up sticks was the way it went. A kind of nursery rhyme."

He gulped. The officers were coming up the hill toward him. Officer Craig diverted, reached in and took the ignition keys out of the lock. He went toward the rear of the Torino.

"You see," Joel said falteringly to Officer Smithson, "it all started this morning in the wine-shop—"

Officer Smithson had him by the arm. "I'm sorry," he said. While Officer Craig casually opened the trunk of the Torino, Officer Smithson studied Joel closely. "We really will have to take you in," he said. "Mr. Camkin feels you assaulted both him and his wife. Uh—if you wish, we have no objection to your explaining about the wine-shop in the

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patrol car."

Joel did. The officers said nothing.

"I'm glad they returned the car," Joel told Cathy over the phone the next morning. "Besides, I'd like you to come down with some money and get me out of here. They've arraigned me on $500.00 bail, and I'm charged with petty theft and assault and battery. It's really funny, isn't it, how this all started just from buckling my shoe?"

"It is funny. I told you that," Cathy told him. "If I had been you, I probably wouldn't have told the officers. I certainly wouldn't have tried to explain it to the judge."

"Why not?" Joel began heatedly. "Look, you think I'm just making this up? You think it's just coincidence, those sticks—"

"Really boards," said Cathy.

"But you're the one called them sticks!"

"Really boards," said Cathy. "I really can't blame you for pushing Mr. Camkin down the hill though."

"I *didn't* push him down the hill," explained Joel. "You see, honey, he hit me on the jaw and I—"

"You should have hit him back, I would say. I'd slap him into left field, and I'm glad you did."

"I see," said Joel weakly.

"Anyway," she went on, "it's going to be all right. Your lawyer called me."

"I don't have a lawyer. What do you mean, my lawyer called you? Where would this lawyer get your number?"

"You mean the lawyer you don't have?"

"That's the one. Where did he get the number?"

"You're mixing me up," Cathy told him with spirit. "If you don't have a lawyer, how could he call me?"

"But did he?"

"Yes. He got my number from someplace and told me I wouldn't have to arrange bail, but that his employers would take care of the necessary details, and that I wouldn't have to come down and pick you up. The charges will be dropped, too, so don't worry, Joel."

"I don't like to have a mysterious unknown lawyer who has employers who are interested in my case," said Joel. "That worries me. What the hell are they up to? Cathy, stick close to the house, don't let anybody in, and if anybody calls you again that sounds suspicious don't make any promises or plans, but call the police. You know how to take care of yourself."

"I'll blow holes in them with my Browning," she promised, "if that'll make you feel any better. I'll see you, dear."

Joel was released an hour later, at 9 A.M. He was given his billfold. His money was reliably counted out to him. His jewelry and a pocket knife were returned. The kindly police del Pueblo de

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Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles waved him toward the door. Outside, a man came up behind him, and took him timidly by the arm. Joel looked down at this man patiently. He saw a skimpy, skinny face, and smeared blue eyes—that is, the man was wearing glasses of high magnification. "I'm Rufus Pester," the man said in a high voice that had little vitality. "I'm your lawyer."

Joel said, "Thank you for bailing me out, Mr. Pester. But I'm just not certain you should have. You see—"

"Oh, but I definitely should have," said Pester hurriedly. "It's vitally important for everybody. My employers—"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about," said Joel. "Who are your employers? Why have they shown this interest in me? What's it all about?"

Pester's smeared eyes shifted nervously. "They have their office down the hall from mine," he said, "and it's hard to tell you my part in it."

"You're not a member of a firm?"

"No." The high voice was painful to hear. "I'm running it on my own, and making a helluva poor showing of it, if you hafta know, so do me a favor, will you, and don't cross me up? I've got enough troubles. I get my business where I can."

Joel started walking toward a phone booth. "I have to call a taxi," he said. Pester ran after him. "But *my* car's here! I'll drive you downtown to my office. Please, Mr. de Tona, you're crossing me up!"

"I'm not trying to," said Joel, taking the receiver off the hook and dropping in a dime. "I just don't want to get mixed up in whatever you're mixed up in. I don't want things to get any funnier than they are. If you'll give me your employers' address, I'll pay them back with a mailed check."

"You're crossing me up," whispered Pester. Then he said, "My God, Mr. de Tona! Don't you understand? My life is in danger. Your life and the life of your girl and of your mother is in danger if you don't work with me."

Joel turned toward him. Pester backed up. "Don't you see?" he cried. "What does it matter if I'm a lousy lawyer or not? I'm your contact man, your only chance. You won't last through the day if you don't work with me."

Then he began to whine. "Besides, don't you want to thank your benefactors?"

"They stink," said Joel.

"Naturally," said Pester.

"You're crazy," said Joel. "One more threat out of you and I'm getting the cops out here."

Pester saw Joel's hardening jaw. He grabbed Joel's elbow. "Don't you see? They *do* stink. They're other-worldly creatures. I know it sound weird. It's the truth. They really aren't bad people, though. Even so, they're paying me a high

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retainer. What else could I do?"

"Turn it down," said Joel. He still had the telephone receiver in his hand. He heard the girl from Directory Assistance ask him several times what number he wanted. He fumbled the receiver back onto the hook. "I'll go with you," he said.

Pester said nothing more until his car was moving. Then he chattered, "A wise decision. You'll see what I mean. It's best for everybody. I'm not ashamed of what I'm doing. I have to fight for my business. Just don't cross me, Mr. de Tona. My God, I've got a wife and kids. Your heart would go out to them. Think of how it was with you, if your parents hadn't been thinking of you and your two sisters—what fine girls they turned out to—"

"Wait a minute!" said Joel. "My two sisters—who told—"

Pester chattered as they turned onto Vignes Street, "Oh, *they* told me. Your life in Klamath, Ohio, in a semi-rural area. Born to Ethel Jean and Joel Louis, a Brazilian banana boat skipper who settled in Klamath and founded a Great Lakes shipping insurance agency. You were a precocious child from the first, Mr. de Tona, more interested in fun and games than anything else—a happy child, and yet with better than passing grades—"

"Fun and games," said Joel. "Maybe so, but how did they know? That's what I want to know. Look, Pester, let me tell you something, about this morning—in the wine-shop—"

Pester turned his sneared blue eyes on Joel. "Wine-shop?"

"Oh. You don't know about that. Well, there's this nursery rhyme, Pester. That's been all my life, and I'm just beginning to pick up a connection."

"Nursery rhyme," repeated Pester, plainly distressed by the turn of the conversation.

"Yes. That damned rhyme has been around all my life! And I'm wondering if your damned friends haven't been around all my life!"

Joel swung around slightly in the car seat. "Look, Pester," he said. "*Have* they been around all my life? Have they been *running* my life like a damned machine, building me up to this minute and this time, programming me and ripening me up—"

"Mr. de Tona! Please! I'm driving! I don't understand what you're saying!"

"You damned well understood what you were saying when you threatened the life of my girl and my mother!" Joel shouted at him.

Pester licked his lips. "They told me to say that," he said finally. "I'm sorry, Mr. de Tona. I had to bring you in to see them." They said it was the right trigger. . . ."

Joel faced toward the windshield again. He sat very still in the moving car, his legs crossed. The nursery rhyme repeated itself in his head:

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"One, two
Buckle your shoe.

"Three, four
Shut the door.

"Five, six
Pick up sticks.

"Seven, eight
Lay them straight.

"Nine, ten—"

Nine, ten what? He had a mental block at the end of the fifth verse. Were there more than five verses? Would he have to live through them all?

His arms crossed his chest as he stared straight ahead.

"One, two buckle your shoes. And three, four, knock on Aunt Bertie's door on the way to school and let her know she's to come to dinner. Are you listening, Joel?

"Five, six, when you come home from school pick up sticks; some firewood, that is, that your dad brought from the lot. Bring the firewood in the house and seven, eight, lay them straight near the fireplace for a company fire.

"And nine, ten, start over again."

Joel sat upright. Pester noticed this and tensed. "Is something else bothering you, Mr. de Tona? Please remember I'm driving—"

Joel subsided, his chin sunk almost to his chest. "I just hope it isn't going to start over again," he said.

"Start—start over again?"

"Yes. But whatever it is, I can see I'm going to have to go through with it, right through to its damned conclusion, whatever that might be."

His memories darkened. It had been a strange game for a mother to play with her child. And it had been played over and over again, with variations, but in situations that were essentially the same. The game began with her, and was sustained through her for a number of years. Then, subtly enough, the game began playing itself.

His memories all seemed strung out on a special necklace of rhyming beads. Possibly there were other memories, but, at the moment, they were being crowded out. He remembered playing baseball in early high-school, but only in the context of buckling cleated shoes, of shutting the locker room door, or possibly knocking on the coach's door, of picking up sticks and laying them straight; and this would refer to baseball bats. The sequence of remembered events started over again with the next game.

Football was not Joel's game. He was too slight of build. But there was the time when the rampaging crowd uprooted the goal posts, and it was Joel's job to collect the pieces of wood and lay them straight. He remembered camping expeditions, saw himself tying or buckling his shoes in

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morning cold, shutting the trailer door after him as he went to collect firewood. He remembered his first job, in a lumber yard. Also he remembered at least one of his early dates, where they ended up playing pick-up sticks with pretzel bars, eating them as they played, head to head, kneeling on the floor. . . .

Had all these events been repititious, sliding one into another, starting over again?

How had he met Cathy?

They were in a pool parlor, and a rack of cue-sticks broke loose from the wall for no good reason, and he and Cathy were on their knees, head to head, picking up the sticks and stacking them straight against the wall. . .

"My God!" Joel said, sitting up. He was shaking, and then he was sweating. He sat like this, shaking and sweating, while Pester tooled his Volvo into a basement garage under the Baker Building, at Fifth & Spring. Pester carefully avoided looking at Joel's whitening face. "We're here, Mr. de Tona," he said, but Joel sat silent, not getting out of the car. Pester shifted anxiously in his seat.

"I'm sure you'll find out about the nursery rhyme someday," he said. "I'm sure of it. Right now we've got some very important things on our mind, Mr. de Tona."

"This *is* important," said Joel. "It's all tied in together. The nursery rhyme. They've been at me all my life. They know what I've been about. They've set up situations for me to fall into—"

Pester's eyes batted. "I don't know about all that," he said, his lips squirming. "All I know is, I've got a job to do. They didn't tell me anything about this nursery rhyme. I think you ought to control yourself, Mr. de Tona."

He reached across Joel and opened the car door. "When you get out," he said, "I want you to stay close behind me, and above all, don't be frightened. Don't be surprised by anything that happens. And don't cross me up!"

Joel finally moved. Pester followed him out of the car, and they walked to the elevator.

ON THE FOURTH FLOOR of the Baker Building, Pester walked jerkily. Finally, they stopped before a blank door. Pester nervously wiped his hand on his coat, then reached for the door knob. The door opened before he could turn the knob. Pester flashed Joel a frightened smile.

"They always do that," he said. "It's uncanny. Somehow they know I'm out here. Okay now, here we go. Just don't cross me, kid. Be nice. Don't be surprised at what you see."

Joel followed Pester into the office. The door closed behind them. Joel looked up at the ceiling and the four corners of the room where several blue and red strobe lights were revolving and causing rapid flickering effects.

"See what I mean?" said Pes-

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ter. "See what I mean about don't get nervous? The lights are always flickering. If you move your hand slow in front of your eyes it gives a weird effect. If you move your hand in a circle at a certain speed, it looks like your hand is going backward from what it is."

"Interesting," said Joel. He tried it. He said, "Like going backward in time, maybe?"

"Exactly," said Pester. "You've hit it. Like going backward in time! You'll see what I mean."

"Okay, Pester," a mechanically vibrating voice said. "Bring him in, and then you can leave."

"He says I can leave," whispered Pester. "But don't worry about a thing. Above all, don't be frightened. They're really not bad people, take my word for it. Anyway, I'll be right outside the door. Or in my office down the hall. If you don't find me there, I'll be at the coffee stand downstairs. Or in the bar across the street. Or maybe at home. Good luck, Mr. de Tona, and don't forget I'm on your side."

While he was preparing Joel with this double-barreled barrage of words, he propelled Joel toward another door, shoved Joel through, and pulled the door shut behind him. Joel was not prepared for what happened. Abruptly, he seemed to be standing on the ceiling, and totally unable to move.

In this inner office, a multitude of strobe lights was in operation. They radiated at Joel from many directions. They were of different colors, and they appeared to move about the room. Joel did not believe he actually was standing upside down. So confusing was this barrage of poly-vibratory and polychromatic radiations, and so confusing their weaving in and out, that one might have felt it strange to be standing erect.

He tried to lift his feet from where he was standing or stuck, but found it impossible to do so.

"Hey," he said weakly. His eyelids had a regrettable tendency to flicker as one or another of the strobes flickered.

"I'm here, Mr. de Tona," a mechanical voice said. "I'm sitting at a desk to your right, on the edge of a kind of large plate, or temporal anode. Good visibility under these conditions is not one of the qualities our engineers strove for. You yourself are affixed to the center of this plate, an inconvenience which he must apologize for."

Joel controlled his eyelids. The desk took form. The shadowy figure of a man in a business suit took form. On the desk was a number of glowing lights and boxes surrounded by vague halos. Beyond the desk shapes walked back and forth, or flickered in and out of existence.

Joel said weakly, "It's not only an inconvenience, I'm sure you realize it's a complete outrage."

The indistinct features of the individual behind the desk turned directly toward Joel. Joel caught

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the fluorescence of long teeth, and glowing eyes set deep. There was the suggestion of a snout, and of a musky, unpleasant odor.

"Yes, I know," the figure behind the desk said gravely. "I understand about your feelings, but our own feelings are rather —long-view; and thus we must look at this matter differently. Since you have had a trying day, we'll cut it short. Would you like to tell us about your day, Mr. de Tona?"

Joel was silent. Then: "Is there anything about it you don't already know? And don't you already know everything else there is to know about me? Obviously?"

A mechanical laugh. "Yes, we know, but we want to hear about your day from *you*. Come, come, Mr. de Tona. Ever since yesterday morning you've been telling people. Let's have it."

Joel said nothing. The silence built up. It rushed into his head, the room revolved, the strobe lights began flickering in a deadly rapid fashion until his throat and head began to burst. "All right!" he shouted. Instantly, the inner pressure in his head died down.

"It started yesterday morning," he said.

"Yes?"

"When I got up. I had this —compulsion to leave one shoe unbuckled."

He told the story, drawing it out considerably, trying to think while he talked.

"That's all," he said. "Here I am."

He decided to stop talking. The strobes went faster. A sensation of edema began in his brain. Now he was weak, and he began thinking of the possibility of physical collapse. It would be one way of evading what was coming. He found he had to talk. He whispered, "It was the fifth verse."

"Say it!"

So Joel recited:

"Nine, ten
Start over again."

At this, the strobe lights faded slowly, and for a moment Joel was nowhere. Then, as if a picture were being filled in, piece by jigsaw piece, he gradually reappeared in a half-darkened room in his own bed, in what seemed to be yesterday morning.

Actually, it was identical; and it was yesterday morning, being relived. He could, however, view this situation as if he were a second person inside his own head.

As might be expected, he commenced to re-live the entire day, and was unable to change an iota of it.

SOMEWHERE amongst the manifold striations of time, space and circumstance, a race was born who permeated in ways awesome and incomprehensible a cosmos-which-Is. Thrice, this race floundered on its way to the All, thrice was decimated, but each time as it rose flamed anew into a burning

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brightness of near perfection until its refined Essence rose to the grandeur expected of it by the Utmost, who then assigned the race a place second only to Itself. At this near-Summit, Jannisari Quatr, also known as Vehitmo Onga (or Lassamoo Hahit) reviewed the accomplishments of his people and found them good, for of nine-hundred eighty-seven competing Conglomerates throughout the cosmos-which-Is, only seventy-seven so far had survived what may be called the Rumplestiltskin Caper, the rest of the Conglomerates being whirled off into a Fifth Arm of the Fourteen Known Coordinates, where the Utmost would hold them in storage for whatever period of time suited His vast purpose.

"Only one Conglomerate remains for testing," broadcast Jannisari Quatr, his Deity Ray (made available to him by the Utmost) reaching all the surviving Conglomerates instantly. "We of the First Conglomerate, having purged ourselves by living through Suffering & Tragedy, having then ascended to Supreme Bliss, and then climbed higher yet to our present state of Fun & Games, are privileged by the Utmost to present this test to the seventy-eighth remaining Conglomerate, which is represented most nobly by that race of beings who are responsible for Mother Goose Rhymes, Grimm's Fairy Tales, and the Tarzan Stories. Most appropriately, the tale of the horrid gnome Rumplestiltskin contains the impetus to survival. As you all know by reason of having survived the Rumplestiltskin Caper yourselves, Rumplestiltskin assisted a young lady to spin gold out of straw, and then demanded her first child in payment. To escape this penalty, she had but to utter a magic word, to wit, the name of Rumplestiltskin himself. This she did, and was spared.

"Therefore, for the refinement of the All, we have taken over the life of a young man who represents the seventy-eighth remaining Conglomerate. By skillfully patterning his entire life to a complex symbolic code which he thinks is a Mother Goose rhyme, we have placed the entire Seventy-Eighth Conglomerate on trial, for as he whirls through the Circle of Time, he is like a spinning armature, cutting temporal lines of force and generating in growing amounts the energies necessary to vibrate him and all life-forms of his type into the Fifth Arm of the Fourteen Known Coordinates, there to stay in storage until the Utmost may have need of them in the years of the final deterioration of All-that-Is.

"To break out of this Circle of Time is the test which will determine the fate not only of his race, but of all the other far-flung races of the Seventy-Eighth Conglomerate, certainly a worthy test which will tell much about the state of refinement that Conglomerate has reached.

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"Will the young man chosen for the test survive? Will he successfully utter the magic words? Will he save his people from their unpleasant fate? Having built you up to a state of titillating suspense, I can only say you will not have the answers to these questions until I, Jannisari Quatr, your Chief Engineer of Fun & Games, returns from one or more encounters with our subject after he spins through his fiftieth rotation."

For a short while the Deity Ray showed a being named Joel Bravura de Tona zeroing relentlessly through the Circle of Time.

Then Jannisari Quatr, also known as Vehitmo Onga (or Lassamoo Hahit) raised his multiply-energized eyes in prayer, thus returning the Deity Ray to the Utmost who, being above Fun & Games himself, but known as The Comforter in the highest of His meanings, could appreciate a predicament when he saw one. Yet, there was no other Way.

JOEL ATTEMPTED to count the number of times he lived through that Thursday and early Friday, but lost track after he counted to twenty-five. After the first five times, he had given up trying to fight the situation. He stopped trying to say something new and different to Cathy as they drove up the Brunswick hill. He no longer tried to *not* pick up the sticks. He began to realize that he would always run through his encounter with Rufus Pester exactly as in the first encounter. He came to know that though the meeting with his tormentor behind the desk in the Baker Building was different in some ways, that he could not evade the final decision to utter the words which programmed him to repeat endlessly this small portion of his life.

A time came, however, when he knew he was Circling—*faster!* After a multiplicity of revolutions through the Circle of Time, this realization regurgitated upon him as he stood affixed to the Time-Plate. He screamed.

As his scream sounded, the fuzzily appearing and re-appearing technicians who hovered in the background beyond the desk and beyond the Time-Plate seemed to come to attention. The long-toothed, and possibly snouted creature seated at the desk himself seemed to lean forward, his eyes glowing more deeply than usual.

"Admirable, Mr. de Tona," he said, his voice still modified through a diaphragm. "If you can keep screaming like that, our psycho-pressures are nullified. I presume you are beginning to see yourself as a spinning armature in a time-field? Perhaps you understand that the energies being generated through space and time are becoming sufficient to whirl you and your race—not to speak of other races in a vast Conglomerate unknown to you—into an extra-dimensional storage bin?

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And that this is for the glorification of All-That-Is?"

Joel continued to scream, not out of design, at first. He was beyond his own control. The situation he was in was the purest kind of horror, far exceeding the horror of being trapped in wet rock far underground. After awhile, however, he was able to produce manufactured screams, timed to allow his captor to speak in completed sentences. At the end of one such sentence, he stopped screaming.

"The Rumplestiltskin Caper," he said. He sobbed, and prepared to scream again as shifting strobe lights began to rotate faster. Instead, he burst out, keeping his voice high and pressured, "What the hell would you know about Grimm's Fairy Tales?"

"By the same token, what would we know about Mother Goose Rhymes?"

Joel attempted to scream once more. He called it off. Something was clicking away in his head. Rumplestiltskin. Grimm's Fairy Tales. Mother Goose Rhymes.

Mother.

Mother was the name of the game.

Joel closed his eyes. This should not be happening. Not at Fifth & Spring in Los Angeles on a sunny Friday morning when he should be at TV-KNIT for the Ten O'clock Sports News with Gil & Joel. What had happened? It had been a mere matter of leaving his apartment on Wilshire Boulevard, buckling his shoe, shutting a door, picking up sticks, laying them straight—

He opened his eyes. Flickering colorations in the beta and possibly the Alpha rhythms flowed through him in smashing array. His eyelids were flickering badly, without control. He allowed the psycho-pressures to build up until the triggering thought was clothed in words:

"Nine, ten, start over again."

As much as it was given to him to function on his own, however, he spoke these words on purpose. He knew the course. He knew what club to use to drive the ball down the fairway. And he was in bed on a Thursday morning at 7:30 A.M.

Now what?

The name of the game was *mother*.

It might be possible to change Thursday to Saturday.

IT'S SATURDAY," he thought, while his controlled body arose and dressed. "It's Saturday, and, as usual, I'll stop by the pay phone on the way out the door and make the usual Saturday phone call to Klamath, Ohio, like I usually do on Saturday. Either Cindy or Claudia will answer, as usual on Saturday, and as usual, since this is Saturday, they'll call their grandmother, who will come to the phone right away, this being Saturday—"

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While he was thinking in this manner, he left his apartment. He stooped over to buckle his shoe, and was on the way down the hall to the exit, was out the door to the small lobby where the pay telephones were.

"It's Saturday," he continued thinking as the pay phones came closer. 'Saturday, and I'm reaching into my pocket for a Saturday dime, and as usual wondering why I don't get a phone of my own, except I'm going to move any day—"

He *was* reaching into his pocket for a dime. It was the same dime, plus two cents, that he gave Bill for a cup of coffee on all the multiple, re-lived Thursdays.

"My God," said Joel. Now he was trembling. He was standing at the phone. Frantically, he was looking around him, as if his doom might come from any direction. On Wilshire, traffic was slight, as it would be on a Saturday morning. There were no pedestrians. The phone was in front of him. He inserted the dime nervously, and heard it tinkle. "I'm out of it," he thought. "I'm out of the Circle of Time.—Operator, I've got a number I want to call collect."

It was not Cindy or Claudia who accepted the call, but by what seemed a mathematical oddity his mother.

"Oh," she said in answer to his instant question, "you don't usually call on Thursday, and they're at school."

"Thursday?" He coughed. His eyes smarted. "Never mind," he said. "I thought it was 'Saturday. . . .Actually it *is* Saturday over here," he added flippantly, "courtesy of Alexander Graham Bell and the First Conglomerate."

Her laugh rumbled. She was a capacious woman, and her laugh came like the sound of freight trains on their tracks. "What kind of game are we playing now, Joel?" she asked. "Or is it important?"

He was silent. "Not particularly important," he said. She was too perceptive for that. "Yes, it is important, but I kon't know how much time I've got. I need some information you might be able to give me." He explained in essence what he wanted. Her answering laugh was one of incredulity, and then of embarrassment. His eyes smarted again. He would have liked to see the laugh-shaken figure of this large woman who had given him birth. He looked down at his feet, planted in front of the phone. He dared not move them, hardly dared even sway from his position. He was convinced he was in Saturday, talking to his mother who was in Thursday, in a remote country where he was born, a remote country of safety and protection. If he could have moved through the wires to Klamath, Ohio, he would have done so.

"About the verses," she said, "that was a kind of silly game. It

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was a kind of obsession with me, I don't know why. They weren't Mother Goose, though. And actually, there were more than five verses. There were ten."

"Ten!"

"Nine, ten, start over again was not the fifth verse. I made that one up, probably to keep it simple or uninvolved, or both. Want to hear 'em?"

"Yeah," said Joel. "Let's hear 'em."

"Here goes," she rumbled.

"One, two
Buckle your shoe

"Three, four
Shut the door.

"Five, six
Pick up sticks

"Seven, eight
Lay them straight.

"Nine, ten
Big, fat hen."

"Big fat hen!" interjected Joel. "The magic words!"

"Hmm." The drawl sounded good-humoredly from Ohio; then there was worry. "Joel," she said slowly, "there's something about this I don't like. Anyway—the rest of them go like this, if you insist:

"Eleven, twelve
Dig and delve

"Thirteen, fourteen
Draw the curtain

"Fifteen, sixteen
Maid's a-kissin'
(Or, maid's in the kitchen.)

"Seventeen, eighteen
Maid's a-waitin'.

"Nineteen, twenty
My plate's empty."

"As for Rumplestiltskin," her rumbling worried voice came, "this is all very strange, Joel. Cindy just now left a book on the kitchen table turned to a fairy tale about a gnome named Rumplestiltskin. He—he assisted a young lady—"

"I know!" said Joel a bit wildly.

"Wait a minute!" she snapped. "I don't know what's going on, Joel. This Rumplestiltskin—he assisted a young lady in spinning gold out of straw. Then he was going to take her first child in payment—except she managed to utter a magic word—the name of Rumplestiltskin itself, as it so happened, and so she didn't have to give up her child.

"Now *you*, Joel," she said menacingly, "*you* start yelling something about some 'magic words.' What am I supposed to think?"

A paralyzed silence stretched for two thousand miles. Joel's teeth were drumming silently against each other in some kind of nervous reaction he could not

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control. He was thoroughly chilled.

"Mom," he gulped out, "the story's too long. I can't talk. I promise to call you. It's all right. Don't worry. You've helped me—just what I wanted to know. Okay if I say goodbye?"

Silence. "All right, Joel," she said quietly. "It's your life. But call me."

He hung up, as if severing a second umbilical cord. He retrieved the dime from the return-change compartment of the pay telephone, and called Cathy collect. She was up. She seemed to accept the call reluctantly.

"Cathy," he chattered, "I don't have time to explain. But it's important. I've only got one dime, and I need it for a cup of coffee down at Bill's Place. Just remember the name Rumplestiltskin."

She was chewing on something. She swallowed. "Who could ever forget it? Are you sure you'll be able to make it for our date tonight?"

"Yes," he said. "Provided it's Thursday."

"What?"

"I mean, it isn't Saturday, is it?"

She came to attention. "What's wrong, Joel? It's Thursday, of course. How could it—"

"All right," he said. "That's better—you're listening. Now Cathy. I want you to follow instructions. No questions. I don't know how much time I've got. I want you to meet me tomorrow morning—that's Friday morning—your time—at 9:20 A.M. on the fourth floor of the Baker Building at Fifth & Spring. Stand in front of the door of Rufus Pester, Attorney, and wait for me. Got that?"

"Got that. Friday morning. *My* time. You are something."

"Here's something else. Bring the Browning and the shells and make me take them. Force them on me. Get the idea? Repeat, please."

"Tomorrow morning at 9:20," she said, repeating the rest of it. "Okay, I read you. But—no questions? How about tonight? Aren't we having a date tonight? Aren't we—"

"No questions," he said. "Gotta go. I'll see you tonight, but we won't be able to discuss it. Just do it, Cathy. Just don't forget. *Bring the gun tomorrow morning!*"

"Right," she said, and he hung up slowly. What had he forgotten? What hole left unplugged? Or had they left a hole unplugged. Not likely. They were still running him, for the glorification of the All-That-Is.

That open fairy-tale book was no mistake, nor the inference of magic words implied therein.

And the fact that each of the ten verses in an old nursery rhyme, if you recited them in the proper rhythm, contained a five-digit code could be no mistake. He cringed. One could imagine a vast digital computer, spread through time and space, running

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his life off on punched cards. But how could it have programmed the phone to handle calls from Saturday into Thursday?

A fragment of a second after he left the phone and started toward the apartment house exit he knew he should have tried to go back to his apartment, thus breaking the time circle. For some reason he didn't try—and why?

It did not occur to him to try to go back to his apartment, and it was too late, for just then the traffic on Wilshire Boulevard subtly doubled.

So he was out of Saturday, and back in Thursday, and moving uncontrollably fast toward his rendezvous with a cup of coffee at Bill's Wine Shop—toward his date with Cathy tonight—toward their inevitable confrontation with a tangled pile of floor-boards on Brunswick Avenue.

The evening with Cathy was strange and distorted, in his mind at least, and it was beyond physical control. He drove his own car, as before, up to South Pasadena, and parked it in the driveway next to the Torino.

In the house, Cathy suggested they use her car, as she had at least fifty times before in multiple re-run.

"It's a nice evening," she said, for at least the fiftieth time. "I put the top down." She was a beautiful happy little girl, running to contrasts of red and green in her make-up and her clothing. She kissed him twice more, then disappeared to the rear of the house for a last check of the lights.

No indication whatever of the Saturday-Thursday 'phone call of the morning.

Was this the Cathy he had talked to? How much did she know? Nothing? Or did she already know about the floor boards they were going to pick up and the cops and—

Joel stood at the door, and out of the corner of his vision—he could not turn his head—he saw the glass gun-case.

The glass gun-case was empty. No Browning!

He wanted to scream, "Cathy! What'd you do with the Browning? Where is it? You didn't put it in the car already! You weren't supposed to put it in the car before tomorrow morning Friday and take it down to the Baker Building. The cops are going to find it in the car!"

Joel tried telepathy. Where is the gun, Cathy? Cathy wasn't talking. No thoughts either; all evening she seemed fresh, happy, unconcerned. No questions, she was probably thinking; you said I shouldn't ask any questions.

They went through that evening. They came up the Brunswick hill, and picked up the sticks.

When Officers Smithson and Craig came to the door, time edged in, folded up, compressed. The conversation about the Browning wasn't there.

That much was different. Would anything else be different?

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Joel rode in the police car behind his own brain, hearing himself speak, and at the same time appalled by the disappearance of the gun, and remembering that Officer Craig was going to open the trunk of the Torino.

Under these circumstances should he—*could* he utter the magic words?

When the time came, as he suspected, it was not at all apparent that he had a choice.

"*Say it,*" Joel was thinking. His thoughts were begging ones, as Mrs. Camkin flew at him, beating at his body with arms like wings, her henna'd hair virtually in his face like stuffy feathers, her cries of outrage like clucking noises in his ears.

"*Say it,*" he begged his body. He felt sparks burning behind his lips, in the motor nerves of his larynx. "*Say it!*" He was backing up against the garage door, protecting himself from the woman's attack, when his lips and voice burst loose and he screamed loud enough for all Pasadena to hear him,

"Nine, ten
Big fat hen!"

Having said this, he was standing before a petrified Mrs. Camkin, and he was laughing. He tried it again, but in a more normal voice:

"Ya big fat hen!"

Mrs. Camkin dropped her beefy arms, the obesities about her lips and chin twisting. "What did you call me?"

"Big fat hen," said Joel. "Whew. What a relief. I broke the Circle again. My apologies, Mrs. Camkin," he explained. "You see, it all started this morning in the wine-shop. No offense, but no matter what, I had to say the magic words—"

Mr. Camkin, breaking loose from the two officers, was pointing up the hill, shouting.

"Officers," he shouted, "I want you to arrest that man. He not only attacked my wife, now he's insulting her. I might have let him get by with stealing my floor-boards—"

Officer Smithson came fast up the hill. He took Joel by the arm. His lips were tight with irritation.

"I told you what we'd have to do if you didn't go along with us," he said. He whirled on his approaching partner, Officer Craig. "I'm sick of this," he said. "I'm going to throw the book at him. Get the trunk of that car open."

While Joel watched, they found the Browning in the trunk of the car. Officer Smithson looked at Joel. "You won't be required to say anything," he said. "May I inform you you will be booked on charges of petty theft and assault and battery. We will find it necessary to impound this weapon pending further investigation."

Joel watched the Browning being transferred to the patrol car. He said, "I'm sorry. You see, it all started this morning in the

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wine-shop—"

He attempted to tell the story in the patrol car. The officers said nothing.

RUFUS PESTER pressed the door of the elevator. The elevator rose, on its way to the fourth floor of the Baker Building. Joel was lost in time, not paying any attention to the automaton of his body. It was the same circular Thursday again, repetitious, no different, unchanging. He was back in the Circle.

It wouldn't change, either. Not again. Not with the Browning impounded and Cathy not here the way she was supposed to be.

The elevator stopped at the fourth floor of the Baker Building, as usual, and, as usual, Pester walked jerkily past the door of his own office to stop in front of a blank door, which he opened merely by extending his hand toward it. There was fright in his smeared blue eyes.

"They always do that," he said for at least the fiftieth re-run. "It's uncanny. Somehow they know I'm out here. Okay, now, here we go. Just don't cross me, kid. Be nice. Don't be surprised at what you see."

Joel started to follow Pester into the office.

"*Joel!*"

Heels were clicking rapidly down the marble corridor from the elevator.

"Joel!" Cathy called loudly. Joel turned toward her.

"Mr. de Tona," said Pester nervously. "The office is here."

"Just a minute," said Joel.

His heart was beating in a new rhythm, his breath was in a new rhythm, even that idiot Pester was differently rhythm'd. Things were happening. Changing. Cathy was coming down the corridor. She was wearing slick black leather boots, a short leather skirt with black and red trim, a red and black blouse covered over with a black leather vest from which yellow tassels hung. Her blue-black hair was in disarray. Her face was pink, dimpled, and anxious.

"I got here as fast as I could," she panted. "The gun store didn't open 'til nine. I had a parking problem. Joel, I'm sure we're all crazy, me especially. There were two different Thursdays, one after the other. In one of them, the first one, you didn't call me about the Browning, but in the second one you did, and I put the Browning in the car, and later on I realized—but you said no questions—and I couldn't have asked them if I wanted to—" She sobbed once.

She was holding a long package wrapped in stiff brown paper. Her voice dwindled off as she handed it to him. He took it. With nervous fingers he tore the wrapping away, and brought the weapon out. It was not a Browning.

"What is this?" asked Pester, his eyes again smearing over with fright. "What's the gun for, de

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Tona? My God, I asked you not to cross me up. You're crossing me up!"

"Who is he?" asked Cathy, still panting.

"My lawyer."

"Oh, I see. The one you don't have."

"He's the one," said Joel grimly. Cathy was holding the open box of shells. Joel was having trouble with the gun, trying to break it while he moved in a semi-circle and faced toward the office door.

"No," shouted Pester, reaching for the weapon. Joel shoved him aside with the 30-inch over/under barrels.

"Stay out of this, Pester," he said nervously. "We have to get rid of these people. Cathy, how the hell— What kind of a gun is this anyhow?"

"I thought you knew about guns," she said.

"Not about this one."

"It's an Ithaca 500," she said. "Let me have it." She broke the weapon, expertly flicked shells, snuggled the walnut stock under her arm. "What do you want me to do?" In her leather outfit, she looked menacing. Pester at this point tried to take the weapon away from her. Joel swung his right arm against Pester's chest, and Pester fell to the marble floor in a staggered sitting position. His glasses hung from only one ear.

Joel said, "All right. There's an outer office and an inner office. There's some strobe lights up near the ceiling in the outer office. Knock them out when I kick the door open."

"Okay," said Cathy. Joel put his foot against the partly open door and kicked it open the rest of the way. They ran into the outer office. The strobe lights were gone, and the room was an ordinary office lighted from the ceiling.

An abrasive, sly laugh sounded. Joel moved toward the door to the inner office where he had been affixed to the Time-Plate. He crouched in front of it.

"They're in there," he whispered to Cathy. "I'm going to kick the door down. Then you move on in and shoot the hell out of them and their equipment."

Cathy stood close to the door, the Ithaca raised so that she was sighting along the plastic gunsight. "I'm ready, Joel," she said. Joel kicked at the door twice before it broke open, and then kicked it again to make it swing wide. As it swung open he yelled,

"Eleven, twelve
Dig and delve!"

He fully expected to see odorous snouted creatures scurrying in shadowy alarm amongst their equipment. The most he saw was a circular silvery area in the middle of the large room which wavered and disappeared. It was the Time-Plate. The strobes were gone, and it was an ordinary room, empty of furniture, lighted by daylight coming through two windows.

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"What do I shoot at?" asked Cathy, lowering the Ithaca. "There isn't anything."

"I know," said Joel.

The laugh, distantly strained through a diaphragm, came again. "She's right, Mr. de Tona. We're leaving. There's nothing to shoot up. The 78th Conglomerate is safe. Admirably indeed, you programmed yourself into a temporal straight-angle when our computers received the variant digital information in the fifth verse. If you had repeated 'Nine, ten, start over again,' you would have failed the test, and the 78th Conglomerate would have been finished. As it was—and we could never express how much we admire you for this—you uttered the magic words, *'Big fat hen.'*

"One more thing, Mr. de Tona."

Joel stood uncertainly. *"Now* what?"

The voice came slyly,

"Thirteen, fourteen
Draw the curtain."

A LITTLE MORE THAN an hour later at the St. Albans house they were finishing a late breakfast, and Joel was reciting explanatorily,

"Fifteen, sixteen
Maid's a-kissing."

He kissed her and added, "Or a different version says, 'Maid's in the kitchen.' Then the ninth verse goes,

"Seventeen, eighteen
Maid's a-waiting."

Cooperating, Cathy raised her lips and waited until he kissed her again. Thereupon he finished up the last of his pancakes, showed her the empty plate, tapped it with his fork and said expressively,

"Nineteen, twenty
My plate's empty.

"Or another version says, *'Time*-plate's empty.' Now lemme have that 'phone. Mom'll be happy to learn that the 78th Conglomerate is safe!"

—ROSS ROCKLYNNE

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Frank Belknap Long is the author of over 300 stf and supernatural horror stories, as well as more than a dozen novels, in a career which has spanned most of this century. He makes his first appearance here in many years with a psychological horror story about a monstrous sea-creature summoned up out of the distant past by a–

COTTAGE TENANT

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

Illustrated by MICHAEL NALLY

"WHEN we were children," Crewson said, trying hard to sound thoughtful and wise, "The Old English Nursery Rhymes and tales of Greek gods unaging seemed just the right kind of reading for eight-year-olds. No one would have dreamed of putting them on a restricted list. But I'm afraid that today—"

He broke off abruptly to stare at Susan Jane, who was two years short of eight and at his son, Timothy, whose recent birthday had made him nine. They bore a remarkable family resemblance, and though his son was the best looking, Susan Jane could hardly have been thought of as "plain."

He avoided looking directly at his wife until Anne Crewson said: "That's nonsense and you know it. Complete, absolute, total nonsense. What would you have them read—sociological tracts?"

Instead of replying instantly, Crewson allowed his thoughts to stray. It seemed such a pity, in a way. No young married couple—he still refused to let ten years alter his perspective in that respect—could have achieved more harmony and fulfillment, if just one "fly in the ointment" could have been set aside. They had an attractive white cottage overlooking the sea, with flowering plants and bright shells in the sun parlor, and the wide half-acre of lawn that sloped down to the sea was a miracle of smooth emerald enchantment, with a pathway of white gravel leading to the wharf and a small cabin cruiser riding at anchor close to the end of it.

They were both employed as well, Anne as second in command at a tourist-frequented village antique shop and himself as a junior high school principal. But somehow they could never seem to agree concerning what was best for the children.

It wouldn't have mattered so much if Timothy didn't say things

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at times which alarmed him. He was doing that now, raising his eyes from the book he'd been reading in a sprawled out position on the floor to comment on what his mother had just said.

"I don't believe any of these stories," he said. "The fall of Troy wasn't like it says here. No one saw what came out of the sea —just a stupid, big wooden horse. All right. There were soldiers inside the horse and they set fire to Troy and burned it down. But the Greeks couldn't have done that without help. They were told what to do every minute."

"Oh, sure," Crewson muttered sarcastically, his concern blotted out for an instant by irritation. "But how do you account for the fact that Virgil and the Greek dramatists didn't view it that way at all? Poets are supposed to be inspired, perceptive far beyond the average. How could they have written about the fall of Troy as they did if they had suspected there was something hidden and hideous about the sea where the Greek ships rode at anchor? This isn't the first time you've let yourself take that tale apart in a silly way—but the time has come to put a stop to it."

To his surprise, Crewson found himself quoting: " 'Troy has perished, that great city. Only the red flame now lives there.'

"That's poetry, Tim boy. Great poetry. And when I was your age those stories meant a lot to me. But kids today—well, that kind of

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reading seems to do more harm than good. Perhaps because life has become too complicated in too many different directions. I don't know. But if a more realistic kind of reading could be substituted I'm sure I wouldn't be so worried about you, and that means a lot to a father."

"Darling, just let him say what he pleases," Anne protested. "All children have strange ideas at times. They exaggerate just one aspect of experience out of all proportion. It's part of the growing-up process."

"It's nothing he could have experienced," Crewson retorted. "He wasn't there."

"Neither was Virgil."

"What does that mean? What are you trying to tell me? That if a boy his age lets his imagination run riot he's doing something we should encourage—if only because it's harmless, and can be chalked up to the marvelous imagination of children? There was nothing childish about Virgil. You'd realize how ridiculous all this is if you'd put Timothy's meanderings into an adult frame of reference."

"You're better at that than I am," Anne said. "What frame do you have in mind?"

"One of simple plausibility. Timothy is sure that something monstrous and long-buried came up out of the sea and took possession of the Greek intelligence. Not one person in ten thousand, child or adult, would have hit on so freakish a conjecture. No—not one in a million. Its very freakishness makes it grotesque. And it disturbs me.

"Besides," Crewson added, "to have taken posession of the Greek intelligence in the Homeric Age would have required some doing, even for a sea monster. Ulysses survived every encounter with monsters on land and sea, remember?"

It was a poor attempt at humor and Crewson knew it. But he was beginning to feel that if he didn't dismiss lightly what his wife had been saying he might end by taking one small part of it seriously. He had never come close to accepting Jung's theory of archetypal images, and only a Jungian would have been willing to concede that Timothy might have dredged something up out of his collective unconscious that was both deeply buried and unusual.

Solely to keep himself from dwelling on that Crewson set his lips in tight lines, swung about and crossed to the door of the sun parlor in three long strides.

"Where are you going, daddy?" Susan Jane asked.

"Just for a walk on the beach," Crewson said, opening the door with a wrench. It always seemed to stick on damp days, and there had been a gray overcast since morning. The fog that had drifted in from the sea had thinned a little, however, and there was a brightness where the sun was trying break through. If the beach just stayed the way it was, he told

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himself, it would be just right for the kind of stroll he enjoyed most. The tang of the brine in his nostrils, a good visibility for two or three yards ahead, and enough scattered seashells underfoot to keep him occupied in a pleasantly active way. Not that he shared Timothy's interest in collecting shells of all shapes and sizes. But he did like to stop occasionally, pick one up and send it skimming out across the surfline.

An unusual shell, or a stranded spider crab or jellyfish gave him a boyish kind of thrill, just why he could not have said. Certainly they were abundant enough on every stretch of New England coastline in the wake of a slight storm, and should have been familiar enough to a New Englander born and bred to stir no interest at all.

"Supper will be on the table in just twenty minutes," Anne said. "Why did you have to pick this time to go for a walk?"

"I always seem to pick the wrong time for just about everything," Crewson said. "I'm truly and honestly sorry, Anne."

"Oh, forget it," Anne said. "Perhaps I married you for that reason. I'm a strange woman in many ways. I guess you've discovered that by now."

Crewson shut the door very quietly behind him. He walked down the white gravel path to the wharf, and then struck eastward across the narrow stretch of beach which fringed his property for close to half a mile in both directions.

The fog had cleared surprisingly fast and he could see, not just two or three yards ahead, but as far as the bleak, ragged ledge of rock which ran out into the bay where Richard Forbes' sailboat was anchored. It was a trim, handsome craft, and had much in common with Forbes himself, who prided himself on his popularity with women. Crewson had often found himself wondering how much the attractive blondes and redheads —only rarely a brunette —Forbes took on brief excursions around the bay appreciated the absolute perfection of the boat's lines and the dent its cost had made in his playboy's income. Probably not excessively. Forbes had kept them too busy.

The sailboat was on Crewson's property, but the water was unusually deep on both sides of the rock projection and he had been only too happy to make Forbes a present of that mooring facility.

Halfway to the rock projection Crewson paused for an instant to stare down at an enormous horseshoe crab which the recent blow had cast up upon the beach in an upside down position. It was wriggling its legs furiously in its efforts to right itself, and he was moved by pity to bend down, pick it up, and toss it far out beyond the small waves that were lapping at the sand a few feet from where he was standing.

A strange thought came into his

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mind—what Timothy had said about the Greek ships riding at anchor in an age remote from ours, but not in the least ancient to a horseshoe crab. For uncounted millions of years horseshoe crabs had survived unchanged, passed over by an evolutionary process that had brought about the rise and fall of the dinosaurs.

He had just started to walk on when he heard the screaming. Two voices seemed to be screaming in unison, one unmistakably that of a woman and the other even more unnerving, because it wasn't often that a man screamed in just as high-pitched a way, but with the unmistakable accents of masculinity.

He had no doubt at all that the screams were coming from the anchored sailboat. The beach was unoccupied by human forms as far as the rock projection, and when screams drifted ashore across a short stretch of water they had to come either from someone thrashing about in the water, or from a boat. And there were no desperately struggling forms anywhere in the water.

Crewson had always believed that it was a mistake to break into a run, unless someone in need of help was in immediate, critical danger. A swift stride could lessen the danger of stumbling and when the distance was very short the lose of a few seconds was more than offset by a gain in purposeful assurance.

He moved swiftly enough, keeping parallel with the surfline, but avoiding a too close approach to the narrow ribbon of sand which the waves had left wet and soggy.

He was soon within wading distance of the boat, with the rock ledge stretching out in front of him like the fanlike crest of some enormous lizard half-buried in the sand.

The tide was receding, but that did not mean that he could reach the anchored craft solely by wading. But the distance he might have to cover by swimming would, he felt, be so short that untying his sneakers and kicking them off would needlessly delay him.

The screams had stopped, but before the water reached to his knees other sounds came to his ears—a creaking and a shuffling, followed by a groan that made him pause for an instant to stare at the boat's rail. He could see nothing and continued on until the water rose to his shoulders.

He was less than thirty feet from the boat when the depth of the water ruled out further walking. He surrendered to the bouyancy of the tide and swam toward the almost stationary craft with a breast stroke, feeling that an overhand crawl would have been an absurdity.

So short was the distance that he was at the rail, grasping it firmly and heaving himself across it before the froglike movements

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of his legs had made more than a slight swirl in the water.

There were two people in the sailboat, both of whom he recognized.

Richard Forbes was dragging himself across the foredeck, one hand pressed to his side and the other grasping the loose end of a coil of rope that kept unraveling like a snake in his clasp. His features were distorted with what could have been either stark terror or dazed incomprehension. It was impossible for Crewson to tell. His jaw sagged and his eyes had a slightly filmy look.

Slumped on the deck a few feet from him was perhaps the most strikingly beautiful of the dozen or more women who had accompanied Forbes in a sailing cruise around the harbor and often further in coastal waters in the past year and a half.

Helen Tanner was thirty or thirty-two but she had the rosy-cheeked complexion of a girl of seventeen. Only now most of the rosiness had vanished and she looked haggard-eyed and drawn. Her pale blonde hair, dampened by the fog, clung to her brow in such a way that, quite suddenly and appallingly, they made Crewson think of Medusa's coils. She had seemed to be bearing up fairly well, but the instant Crewson looked directly at her her expression changed and she screamed once shrilly, and then fell silent with a look that might well have turned Perseus to stone.

It was a terrible, fathomless look, as if she had gazed on something so monstrous that it had drained away all that was womanly in her.

But still, despite all that, she seemed to want desperately to tell him what had happened to bring her to such a pass. Her lips moved, twitching spasmodically, and she raised herself a little more and her hand went out toward him.

He moved toward her on his knees—getting to his feet had seemed less urgent that reaching her before she collapsed—and took firm hold of her hand.

"What is it? he breathed. "What has happened here? Did—did Forbes try to attack you?"

She shook her head. "No, no—Oh, God, no. He's badly hurt. Can't you see? It tore at his side. . .clawed him."

Forbes' voice came then, as if from a great distance, as if the air surrounding him had changed into a swirling vortex carrying him far away in space and time. There was a deadness in his voice, a hollowness. Yet it seemed laden with anguish as well.

"It was like a mist at first—a mist that crept in over the rail. I thought it was just the fog—coming back again, getting quickly denser, as fogs often do."

Crewson released his tight grip on Helen Tanner's hand, swung about and stood up, a little sur-

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prised by the steadiness in his legs. He was grateful for the slight swaying of the boat, for it enabled him to cross to Forbes' side in a somewhat lurching way. Otherwise he might have given Forbes the impression that he was sturdily in command of himself and he did not want to do that. A man or woman in great distress, in need of support, likes to think that he is not alone in experiencing inner torment. The comforter, Crewson knew, has to be a little shaken himself—if he is to provide a wholly sympathetic kind of support.

He took as firm a hold of Forbes' shoulder as he had of Helen Tanning's hand and cautioned: "Perhaps you'd better not try to talk. Suppose you just let me have a look at your side. The wound may not be as bad as you think."

Forbes made no attempt to rise. But he removed the hand that had been pressed to his side, exposing a dull, red stain that was triangular in shape. His sport shirt was badly ripped, with pinpoints of glistening redness on the torn cloth where it clung to the wound in frayed strips.

He shook his head when Crewson bent to examine more closely one of the lacerations, which seemed the opposite of a superficial scratch.

"No sense in looking at it," Forbes said, quickly replacing his hand. "I know how bad it is. Its talons were like little knives. If they had been longer—"

"Its talons?"

"I tried to tell you. Why did you stop me? It was like a mist at first, and then it changed. It changed into some kind of animal. It was jet black and had four limbs and a head. The head kept getting larger and there were eyes in it, and I think it had a beak. But I can't be sure, because something happened to my mind. I could see nothing clearly after that."

"Did you try to defend yourself when it attacked you?" Crewson heard himself asking. "Did you struggle with it?"

Forbes let go of the rope he'd been gripping and pounded the deck with his fist, as if just remembering what had happened demanded some kind of emotional release.

"I couldn't move. I tried to back away from it, tried to get the rail behind me for support. But it rose up and flung itself at me while I was in a state of shock. There was a heaviness in my legs, and the deck looked warped, twisted up. It *must* have done something to my mind."

"It didn't attack Miss Tanner?"

"No, she tried to make it let go of me. She screamed and tugged at it. I don't know why it didn't turn on her. You can see what just the sight of it has done to her."

"It may have been the feel of it," Crewson said. "I didn't ask her."

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"Please don't," Forbes said, staring across the deck to where Helen Tanner was still sitting motionless, her shoulders now a little hunched, and her fingers pressed to both sides of her brow. "She's been through enough."

The salt sea air which had always meant so much to Crewson seemed suddenly an unhealthy kind of air to breathe.

He found that he could not take seriously a great deal of what Forbes had said. But something *could* have come flopping up out of the sea and landed on deck —probably had. A seal perhaps. They were not unheard of in New England waters. Then some kind of wild hysteria could have gripped both Forbes and Helen Tanner, and—

But how explain the lacerations on Forbes' right side and his ripped shirt?

Could Helen Tanner have succumbed to so wild a fright that she had lost all contact with reality and lunged at him with a knife, mistaking him for whatever it was that had flopped over the rail to the deck? But if she had done that what had happened to the knife?

Crewson came to a quick, firm decision. He bent and took steadying hold of Forbes' shoulder for the second time.

"We've got to get you to a hospital," he said. "I'll go ashore and come right back, and drive you both to East Windham. Miss Tanner needs immediate medical attention. The worst wounds are not always physical."

"You can say that again," Forbes muttered, with a slight upward tilt to his lips that didn't quite result in a smile.

It was past midnight when Crewson returned to the cottage after a two-way, fifty mile drive. He put the car back into the garage and walked wearily up the white-gravel path to the door of the sun parlor, surprised by its lighted up aspect.

The instant he passed through the door he was greeted by Timothy with an opened book still in his hand.

"What happened, Dad?" he asked. "What did they say at the hospital. Were they surprised?"

"Naturally they were surprised," Crewson said. "A man with a bad wound in his side he can't readily explain away and a woman half out of her mind."

He looked steadily at his son for a moment, then demanded: "Why are you up so late? I hope you have an excuse that stands up. I'm sure it can't be because you were worried about me."

"I never worry about you, Dad," Timothy assured him. "You can take care of yourself."

"I often wonder about that," Crewson said. "Going for a walk when supper was practically on the table wasn't such a bright idea—in view of what happened on the beach."

"Do you believe Mr. Forbes' story?" Timothy asked.

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"I'm sorry I even mentioned what happened when I came back to get the car," Crewson said. "Now look. Forget about that excuse. What I want you to do is go straight upstairs to bed. You've done enough reading for today."

"The Grecian ships—" Timothy began.

Crewson suddenly became as angry as he was capable of becoming in the presence of his son.

"You heard me. Straight upstairs to bed. I'm very serious, Timothy."

"All right. But I just wanted you to know that what happened to Mr. Forbes wasn't my fault. I couldn't have stopped it. If I hadn't been reading about the Fall of Troy—"

It confirmed everything that Crewson had feared. Stories of heroes and mythological monsters and ancient cities famous in song and legend might or might not be just the right kind of reading for children living under the shadow of The Bomb. But even if that could be debated pro and con it was the worst possible kind of reading for his son.

It was Timothy above every other child in the world that he had been seeking to safeguard in taking what his wife had considered a ridiculous stand.

Was it already too late? Had Timothy lost all contact with the world of sobriety and common sense? Childhood schizophrenia—

It was a horror he refused to dwell on. Not tonight, not after all he had endured. It had been even worse at the hospital, in a way, than when he'd heaved himself up over the rail of Forbes' boat, and looked into Helen Tanner's fathomless, terror-haunted eyes. At the hospital she had collapsed again and they had carried her, shrieking and raving, into the emergency ward. It had taken two strong interns to control her.

"Timothy," Crewson said.

"What is it, Dad?"

"Forgive me if I spoke a little harshly. Just go upstairs now and turn in. And try not to wake your mother. She may be needing all the sleep she can get."

"But don't you want to know why—"

"I don't want to hear anything more tonight," Crewson said, silencing his son with a look that it would have been unwise for Timothy to ignore. "We'll talk about it tomorrow."

As soon as Timothy had vanished in the darkness at the top of the staircase Crewson took a slow turn up and down the sun parlor. It wasn't even a moon parlor now, since the night beyond its wide-paned windows was inky black, and the instant Timothy had ceased to make the stairs creak he had reached up, and pulled the chain on the hanging electric bulb which his son had left blazing.

He had no particular desire to join his family upstairs. Anne, he knew, would go right on sleeping and not miss him at all unless she

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happened to wake up and if she did she would take it for granted that he'd chosen to spend the rest of the night on his favorite couch.

Timothy would tell her that he'd returned safely, even if she didn't come downstairs to make sure. Probably she wouldn't, because he'd made a habit of sleeping on the couch several times a month, where the air was cooler on hot nights. It was something Anne did herself at times, creeping downstairs in the middle of the night and leaving him to slumber on in the heat in their upstairs bedroom.

The couch was quite long and spacious and since it was on the side of the sun parlor where a cool breeze from the sea blew in most strongly—if just one window remained raised—all Crewson had to do was stretch himself out at full length and relax.

It creaked a little as he eased himself down, making him decide to oil the springs in the morning. He sighed, turned on his side and almost immediately fell asleep.

Just how deep it was he had no way of knowing. He only knew that he awoke once, aware of an unusually strong sea smell in the room, but was far too drugged with sleep to pay it much attention. In a deep, half-conscious way he remained aware of it for perhaps a full minute, but so overwhelming was his drowsiness that when it became no stronger he made no effort to resist the tug of slumber.

When he opened his eyes again the sun parlor was no longer in total darkness. There was a faint glow in the eastern sky, and though the light which had crept in through the windows was too dim to enable him to see more than the shadowy outlines of the furniture—three chairs, a flower-stand, and a small, circular table—he could make out something huge and misshapen in a far corner that should not have been there at all.

It was too solid-looking to have been a shadow. And there was nothing in the sun parlor that could have cast one of that shape and size.

For a moment Crewson wasn't in the least frightened. There were so many ways of explaining something like that—a big chunk of bark from the dead oak on the lawn, ripped from the trunk and blown through the open window by a fierce gust of wind in the night, or something Timothy had lugged downstairs in the small hours, being too restless to sleep and wanting something to do. Or just possibly—but no, it was far too large to be a cat or a woodchuck or a skunk.

The chill began when he realized that thinking it might be some animal that had climbed through the window while he slept might very well be the truth. It got worse when it began to move about, sending so great a coldness lancing up through him that his lips began to shake.

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He sat up abruptly, as wide awake as he had ever been, jolted by an awareness of danger so acute that it drove every vestige of slumber from his brain. Only the dimness of the light prevented him from seeing it clearly, for his vision had ceased to be even slightly blurred.

There was something vaguely parrot-like about it. But its body did not seem in the least birdlike and it moved with a scrapping sound, as if its feet were claw-tipped.

Crewson was shaking violently and uncontrollably now. He knew that he possessed as much courage as most men. But when a breath from the unknown blew cold upon anyone, man or woman, courage became a relative thing. It had always been that way, from the rude beginnings of human life on earth.

There *was* a breath—sea bottom-fetid, as if some decaying shellfish had been stirred into a vaporized broth and sprayed into every corner of the sun parlor. It was moving toward him more swiftly now, swaying as it advanced, and making a sound that he had never associated with an animal of land-dwelling habits. It was neither a growl or a catlike whining, but a kind of blubbery smacking-together of what may or may not have been lips.

Suddenly it reared up and appeared to increase in bulk, and that abrupt change in its attitude seemed to do something to the light. There was a sudden brightness high up under the ceiling, bringing into view an enormous, shining beak and two eyes as large as dinner plates that were trained so fiercely upon Crewson that he could feel the heat of them searing his pupils and burning its way into his brain.

There was an abrupt, loud clattering on the stairs, followed by a thud. It brought about an instant dimming of the light again. The beak and the eyes hovered for the barest instant in the diminished glow and then whipped away out of sight. The high-rearing bulk of the monstrous shape began to dissolve as Crewson stared, growing more and more attenuated until nothing but a thin curtain of revolving mist lingered between the couch and the corner of the room from which it had emerged. And in another moment even the mist was gone.

Crewson's trembling had not stopped. But shaken as he was, he somehow managed to stand up and jerk at the chain of the hanging light bulb which he'd turned off long ago, in another age surely—some immeasurably remote period in time when his sanity had not yet deserted him in quite so total a way.

The instant the sun parlor became flooded with light he saw Timothy. He was lying at the foot of the stairs in a sprawled out heap, with no trace of animation in his limbs or features. His eyes were tightly shut and he was

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pajama-clad, and there was a swelling, dark bruise on his forehead which was visible from where Crewson stood.

It was the bruise more than anything else which brought Crewson to his son's side with a concern so acute that he staggered and almost fell. He bent and gathered Timothy into his arms and started shaking him, not trusting himself to speak.

Timothy opened his eyes and stared up at him. "What happened, Dad? I was just starting to— Did I trip? Yeah, I must have taken a tumble. Everything went black."

"You had a very bad fall," Crewson heard himself muttering, his concern suddenly less acute. "Are you all right? Do you *feel* all right? Not dizzy or anything?"

"Maybe I'll feel dizzy if I stand up," Timothy said. "But I guess not. I feel pretty good."

"I'm glad of that, at least," Crewson said. "But I don't know why you should feel good, after giving me a scare like that. Why did you come downstairs at this hour? Tell me."

"I stayed up all night, Dad. I was reading in bed. Then I started worrying about what might happen if I kept thinking about what happened when the Greek ships—"

"Stop right there," Crewson ordered. "We're not going into that again. Not now—or ever again. Do you understand? I don't want to hear about it."

"All right, Dad. But that smell will keep coming back."

Crewson's heart skipped a beat. "What smell?" he demanded. "What are you talking about?"

Just the fact that he knew only too well what Timothy was talking about meant nothing, one way or the other. The last thing he wanted to do was let Timothy know that he knew.

"Susan smelt it too," Timothy said, defensively. "It woke her up. When Mom boils a lobster and when she steams clams Susan can't stand the smell. She stays out on the lawn until supper's ready. You never get cross with her."

"She's allergic to sea food," Crewson said. "I've told you that many times. But it's mostly shellfish. That's why we never let her eat shellfish."

It was an irrelevant remark. But Crewson felt it would encourage his son to talk more freely, and he no longer wanted him to stop.

"It came right up out of the sea again," Timothy said. "*I* can always tell. But when Susan smelled it I knew it was getting bad. It will be like that now even when it doesn't come back. Mom will smell it, too."

"Is that why you came rushing downstairs so fast—to find out if I smelled anything strange?"

Timothy shook his head. "I was scared you'd see it. That's worse than just smelling it. Mr. Forbes saw it, and was nearly killed."

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Crewson had forgotten for a moment what Timothy had said about feeling dizzy if he tried to walk. But now all of his concern came back.

"Get up, son," he said. "Walk up and down a few times. We've got to make sure that bump on your head is nothing to worry about. Kids your age take so many tumbles you get in the habit of giving it little thought. But sometimes you don't worry enough."

Timothy got up and walked back and forth until his father told him to stop.

"Any dizziness?" Crewson asked.

"No, Dad. I feel fine."

"I'm glad. There's just one more thing I want you to do. Go upstairs and wake your mother up. Tell her I have to see her right away. And don't come back with her. Just go to your room and stay there. I've got to have a long, serious talk with her."

If Timothy had the slightest inclination to disobey it was not apparent in his behavior. He turned slowly and went back up the stairs, dragging his feet a little as if in sullen protest against parental dominance.

Five minutes later Anne Crewson was sitting at her husband's side, listening to what he was saying without making any attempt to interrupt him. The creaking of the couch as she shifted her position almost continuously was more revealing of the way she felt than her expression, for she was a woman who could endure a great deal of inner torment with composed features.

Crewson carefully avoided so much as hinting at the torment that *he* had endured before his son's fall had made a horror beyond sane description waver and vanish. He started with Timothy's mishap, explaining that it was the crash that had awakened him. But he told her everything that their son had said and when he had finished he was almost sure, from the long silence which ensued, that her concern was now as great as his, and perhaps even surpassed it.

Her voice, when she spoke, was slightly tremulous. "We're very lucky, in a way, Ralph. Dr. Moorehouse is not only a kindly and understanding man. He doesn't really belong in a town as small as East Windham, even though they have a quite large, general hospital. I don't need to tell you how famous he has become. There are few child psychologists—"

"He started as a Jungian analyst," Crewson said, before she could continue. "Most of his patients, in those days, were troubled adults. He's still a Jungian, I've been told, but yes—he's a good man. I've never had anything against Jung—or Freud, for that matter, except that I've never been a convert to any kind of analytical therapy."

"Most people are today," Anne

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said.

"No, I wouldn't say that exactly," Crewson said. "It's a big world and we make a mistake when we let ourselves forget it."

"You picked a strange time to interpose objections," Anne said. "Timothy is more than just troubled. There are few adults—"

"That's not what you said when Timothy was sprawled out on the floor reading about the Fall of Troy for the fiftieth time. I told you then that it was the wrong book. A very bad book *for Timothy*—even if a case could be made out for letting that kind of reading fall into the hands of comparatively well-balanced children for a while longer."

"I've changed my mind, that's all," Anne said.

Crewson reached out and pressed his wife's hand. "I'm glad you have. I'll drive to East Windham and have a talk with Moorehouse just as soon as you can perk some strong coffee—make it three cups. Black, no cream."

"That's unusual for you," Anne said, trying very hard to smile. "You hate black coffee. Oh, hell—I'll boil you two eggs while I'm at it. It won't take more than ten minutes."

Under ordinary circumstances Crewson would have phoned Dr. Moorehouse to check on his availability before driving to East Windham at so early an hour. But he needed to get out into the open in a speeding car regardless of the hour and no matter how soon he arrived in the town a period of waiting seemed inevitable, and he saw no reason for worrying about whether it would be long or comparatively short.

Possibly, he told himself, an appointment could be arranged as early as ten o'clock at Moorehouse's residence. And if it had to be later at the hospital, where the psychiatrist was a staff therapist, East Windham was a pleasant enough town to keep the dread which darkened his thoughts from becoming overwhelming for a few hours.

It turned out better than he had dared to hope and a phone call to Moorehouse's home on his arrival secured him an appointment at nine-thirty. The hour and a half of waiting which remained he spent roaming through the more ancient part of the town, studying the old houses, some dating back to the sixteenth century, and talking for twenty minutes on the phone with Forbes, in his private room at the hospital.

The news he received was reassuring. Forbes' wound had been well attended to, and unless some complication developed, which seemed unlikely, he would be up and about again in a few days. And Miss Tanner was no longer under sedation.

He arrived at Moorehouse's home ten minutes ahead of time and was ushered into his quite large, tastefully furnished office facing the street by his wife, a

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quiet-spoken, attractive woman who was quick to explain that his regular office hours were eleven to one, and were followed by his duties at the hospital which sometimes kept him occupied all night.

"Sometimes he sees patients earlier," she told Crewson. "He's been terribly busy in recent weeks. Everything's so uncertain today that people are taking up more and more of his time. I worry about the schedule he's imposed on himself."

She nodded and shut the door, and Crewson found himself staring across the sunlit room at a slightly stoutist, gray-haired man with thoughtful brown eyes, and rather small features that were finely-chiseled and verged on the handsome. There was nothing particularly distinguihed about him, but there was something in his expression that inspired confidence at first glance.

He arose from behind his desk, gestured to a chair drawn up opposite the desk and sat down again. He did not offer his hand in greeting, but his first words put Crewson completely at his ease.

"We have two mutual friends, it seems. But this is the first time I've had the great pleasure of meeting you in person. I understand you wish to talk to me about your son."

Crewson had debated with himself the wisdom of telling the composed, widely experienced man who now sat facing him everything that had happened since the previous afternoon, starting with Timothy's wild talk and the angry scene with his wife that had made him decide to go for a walk on the beach.

He abruptly decided that he would be defeating his own purpose in seeking the psychiatrist's help if he kept anything back, including the appalling spectacle which had confronted him when he'd heaved himself over the rail of Forbes' boat.

Quite possibly Moorehouse had talked with Forbes at the hospital and already knew about that. The emergency had been an unusual one, and a staff psychiatrist could well have been summoned to provide some immediate help, particularly since Helen Tanner had undergone a dangerous kind of hysterical collapse.

It took Crewson close to half an hour to acquaint Moorehouse with a sequence of occurrences that went far beyond what the psychiatrist could have surmised from just talking with Forbes. And he was careful to stress that not only were they sanity-threatening, but seemed to bear some frightening relationship to Timothy's state of mind.

When he had finished Moorehouse remained for a long moment staring at him with an inscrutable expression on his face. Then he arose quietly, walked to the window and stared out, as if he needed an even longer moment to think over what he had

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been told.

When he returned to the desk and resumed his seat the inscrutable expression had vanished. It had been replaced by a look of restrained reassurance.

"Let me ask you something," he said. "Just what kind of a boy is your son? Oh, I know. You've described him, but not sufficiently. Is he ever in the least outgoing, despite his tendency to engage in daydreaming a great deal of the time?"

"He can be," Crewson said. "With other kids at times. And I guess you could say he is with me. He talks back, gets aggressive and disobeys. But most of the times he's obedient enough."

"Children are always a little outgoing with their own parents," Moorehouse said. "I wasn't really thinking of that. Is he the kind of boy who has a lot of bottled up emotions he'd like to display in an aggressive way, despite his introspective tendencies? But he doesn't, simply because daydreaming seems easier, and more emotionally satisfying to him except at rare intervals. But then, once in a while he lets go, really lets go. He blackens the eye of some kid he regards as a bully, and gives a damned good account of himself in other ways. Am I describing him accurately?"

"Very," Crewson said.

"Just how familiar are you with the Jungian hypothesis in general?" Moorehouse asked.

"Not too familiar," Crewson replied. "It covers so wide a territory. But I've dipped into Jung now and then.

"You refer to it as an hypothesis," he couldn't resist adding. "Are you implying you don't accept the whole of Jung?"

"Naturally I don't," Moorehouse said. "If I did that I'd be a bum psychiatrist from the word 'go'. No mathematical physicist in his right mind would, or could, accept the whole of Einstein. It's the last thing Einstein would have wanted anyone to do.

A very earnest, serious expression came into Moorehouse's eyes. "Only one aspect of the Jungian hypothesis in general concerns me now. I'll try to discuss it as briefly as I can. It's the very familiar one, the one that four people out of five—and that would take in the bartender at the cafe a block from here—would know what you were talking about if you mentioned it in casual conversation. I'm referring, of course, to man's collective unconscious, the repository of archetypal images which Jung was firmly convinced we all carry about with us in the depth of our minds."

He paused for a moment, and though Crewson had more than an inkling of what Moorehouse was about to say he waited patiently for him to go on.

Before doing so Moorehouse removed a cigarette from the package at his elbow, lit it and took a few slow puffs.

"Those archetypal images," he

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resumed, "are often frightful —enormous snakes, and tribal effigies with chalk-white faces and legendary kings with scepters of fire who practiced cruelty night and day. All that we know. But Jung even suggested—since there is no way of knowing how far the collective unconscious goes back in time—that images from a reptile-stage or fish-stage period of evolution may form a part of man's buried ancestral heritage. And that would explain the frequent appearance as archtypes of fanged and flying lizards or even more hideous monsters from the sea."

Moorehouse fell silent again, and Crewson found himself wondering, with some concern, if he had allowed the way he was staring at the psychiatrist to make him reluctant to say more.

Very quickly he ceased to stare, looking beyond Moorehouse to the glimmering patch of sunlight on the opposite wall.

"Just what are you trying to tell me?" he asked. "It would be very hard for me to believe—"

"Yes, I know," Moorehouse interposed. "It would be hard for me to believe it too. But Jung once allowed himself to speculate—wait, put it this way. What if a very imaginative child—or an adult, for that matter—with the bottled up aggressive drives we've discussed—became abnormally stimulated in some way by something he had read? I mean— you see—"

"I'm afraid I don't see."

"I'm sure you do. It's always a mistake to conceal from ourselves what we would prefer not to believe."

"Aren't you doing that yourself, right now? You just said—"

"I said it would be very hard for me to believe and that's true. There's no dishonesty in that. But we do know that visual images —even when they are not archetypal—can seem more real to us if we link them to something we've read. A book of mythology for instance, or—if you were a child in the Victorian age—the darkly frightening, even cruel world of fantasy conjured up by the Brothers Grimm."

"Are you trying to make me believe that an archetypal image in Timothy's mind took on form and substance, and—"

Moorehouse raised a protesting hand. "I'm not asking you to believe anything. It's Timothy you're most concerned about and so am I. You came here to consult me for no other reason. We've got to help Timothy, because when a sensitive, imaginative child with many fine qualities is in trouble—well, there's no greater tragedy."

"For God's sake," Crewson heard himself saying. "What do you suggest? What would you have me do?"

"Just listen carefully. Has Timothy ever spent the summer in a boy's camp, in everyday, relaxed contact with other kids his

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age? Has he ever gone in for bird watching and paddled around in a canoe, and played tennis, and baseball and engaged in a half-dozen other sports? Very strenuous ones, guaranteed to make him feel so tired at night he'll just drop down exhausted and sleep like a log until he's caught up in another day of activity?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Crewson heard himself replying. "We never felt—it was partly his mother's fault. She couldn't bear the thought of not seeing him for six or eight weeks. And he never cared much for sports, aside from baseball."

"There's a camp right here in East Windham," Moorehouse said. "An excellent one, which I can personally recommend. I have a nephew Timothy's age, and he has spent three summers with the Wheltons. It's in the deep woods, by Sharon Lake—not twenty minutes drive from the center of town."

"That means we could see him—"

Dr. Moorehouse shook his head. "No—I wouldn't advise that. If you love your son you'll make him understand that when once he's deposited in the camp he's staying there until fall. That will not prevent you from writing to him—as often as you wish."

Crewson got slowly to his feet and this time Moorehouse reached across the desk, and firmly clasped his hand. "When Timothy comes back," he said. "You may find that your worries are at an end."

There was a telephone handset on Moorehouse's desk and Crewson tapped it with his forefinger. "May I—call my wife on this phone? I'd like to get this settled as quickly as possible."

"By all means," Moorehouse said. "I was just about to suggest it."

A moment later Crewson was saying into the phone, "Anne, I want you to pack a few of Timothy's clothes—in that small, brown-leather suitcase in the hall closet. Just an extra pair of trousers, sneakers, two or three flannel shirts—you know what you packed for him when he spent the weekend with your sister in Brookdale two summers ago. Everything he'll need for a few days away from home.

"What's that? No, darling, I can't go into it now, but he'll be going on a short visit. Yes, yes, I've talked with Dr. Moorehouse and I'm phoning from his home. It's something he felt was most urgent."

Anne's voice came so frantically over the line that he had to hold the receiver away from his ears for a moment. When the protests stopped he added: "Nothing to worry about, darling. Everything's fine. Timothy is going to be all right. I'll explain when I get back. I just want to be sure the suitcase is packed, and that Timothy will be ready to leave with me when I drive up in the car. Right

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away—that's most important."

He hung up before Anne could protest further.

"You handled that very well," Moorehouse said.

Driving home on a road that skirted the sea for a mile or so at frequent intervals Crewson kept turning over in his mind everything that Moorehouse had said to him. It was hard for him to believe any part of it, and he very much doubted if Moorehouse took more than a tenth of it seriously.

But in one-tenth of a far out surmise there might reside just enough truth to make its dismissal an act of folly. What did the Jungians advise when a problem of that nature presented itself?

Dismiss nothing as absolutely unbelievable. Watch every step you take, tread cautiously. There may well be some kind of tenuous connection between the logically untenable, and the mysterious nature of ultimate reality.

Perhaps nothing so gross as a visual image, archetypal or otherwise, could be thought of as capable of separating itself from the mind, at least in part, and acquiring destructive, physical attributes.

But terrifying occurrences had seemingly taken place which had come as no surprise to Timothy and his wild talk had clearly established some kind of relationship between his thoughts and the occurrences. Perhaps Moorhouse had been all wrong about the nature of those relationships. But just the fact that they appeared to exist made caution mandatory.

The shape that had towered above the couch with its eyes malignantly trained on him had dwindled and vanished a few seconds after Timothy had tripped on the stairs and struck his head in falling. It seemed unlikely that the sudden blotting out of Timothy's consciousness could have been totally unrelated to the shape's disappearance. Unanticipated coincidences were perhaps common enough under ordinary circumstances. But when something happened that was both terrifying and unusual how often did coincidence play a role as well? It was asking too much of the law of averages, was loading the dice in a totally unacceptable way.

Crewson tightened his hold on the wheel of the speeding car, wishing the sea would not come into view so often. The breeze whipped at his hair, setting it to swirling on his brow and occasionally half-blinding him.

Suddenly the long ledge of rock where Forbes' boat was still bobbing about in the tide came into view and all of his apprehension vanished. It was close enough to the cottage now to bring the car flush with the garage, leap out and cross the lawn in eight or ten long strides.

Twenty seconds later he was doing just that, the wind still whipping at his hair. He was almost at the door of the cottage when the wind brought so strong

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an odor of decaying shellfish to his nostrils that he came to an abrupt halt.

He started to turn, to see if the odor became stronger when he faced the wharf. But before he'd swung completely about he realized it could only be coming from the cottage. The tide was at its full, and there were no mud flats from which it could have been carried by the wind.

He remained for an instant motionless, facing the door without jerking it open, choosing to listen instead. The slightest sound from within the cottage—light, unhurried footsteps, Anne's voice or that of the children talking back and forth would have dispelled the fear which had come upon him, and he desperately needed such reassurance. It was worth waiting for five, six, seven seconds. Waiting longer was unthinkable and when no sounds came to his ears he grasped the doorknob, gave it a violent wrench, and entered the cottage in a kind of stumbling rush.

He almost stumbled over Anne. She was lying slumped on the floor just inside the door, her face drained of all color. He was instantly on his knees at her side, slipping one arm under her shoulder and raising her to a sitting position. She moaned and stirred a little, but he had shake her and plead with her to say something—anything—before her terrible limpness vanished and she leaned heavily against him, her voice coming in choking gasps.

"Ralph, it—it's horrible! Half fish, half hairy animal. I tried to—make it let go of Timothy—and it hurled me across the room. Everything went hazy for a minute. I thought—my back was broken. If you hadn't started shaking me—"

Her hand went out and fastened on his wrist. "You've got to get to them. Timothy was screaming and Susan—"

Both of the children!" Crewson couldn't seem to breathe. *"Where are they? I don't see them!"*

"It dragged Timothy upstairs. And Susan ran after them. I couldn't stop her."

"All right—careful now," Crewson cautioned. "Just lean back against the wall when I take my arm away. Don't twist about. *And don't try to get up.*"

"I won't. But hurry, darling! It may not be too late—"

Crewson got swayingly to his feet, and in another moment was mounting the stairs, ascending to the floor above with a nightmarish feeling of unreality making it hard for him to believe it wasn't happening to someone else.

Sunlight was streaming in through the two small windows in the upper hallway but there was a swirling curtain of mist at the end of the hall which prevented him from seeing into Timothy's room. Since Timothy seldom closed the door on summer days Crewson didn't expect to find it shut. But

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the thought that it might be gave him little concern. He felt fully capable of battering it down, and he moved now with a steadiness of purpose which, for an instant, had almost deserted him on the stairs.

The odor of decaying shellfish became sickening as the mist swirled up about him, forcing him to cover his face with his hand. Then he was inside the room, staring up with his hand lowered, feeling a wetness start up on his forehead and turn into a cold trickling which ran down both cheeks to his throat.

Timothy was suspended betwen the floor and ceiling by long tendrils of mist that crisscrossed and held him enmeshed, as if he had stumbled by accident into a vast, glowing spiderweb and been elevated to its exact center by his own furious struggles to escape.

Lower down in the web Susan Jane was also enmeshed. But she had seemingly given up struggling and dangled as limply as a calico doll tossed carelessly across a bedpost for the night.

Behind the web a huge shape towered, beaked and taloned and faintly rimmed with sunlight from a window which its bulk had nine-tenths blocked out.

When Timothy saw his father he stopped struggling so abruptly that his limbs seemed still in motion, for the web continued to tremble for a moment in the same violent way. Timothy could not have looked more frightened and despairing, and that seemed to be keeping him from surrendering to another kind of emotion.

It was only what he said that startled Crewson and made him stare unbelievingly.

"If you don't go it will kill you, Dad. I don't want you to die. Tell Mom goodbye. I love her very much. You, too, Dad."

Timothy's voice seemed so startlingly calm and adult it was hard for Crewson to realize it was his own son speaking.

Crewson throat had tightened up, and for an instant he could say nothing in reply. His mouth felt as dry as death, and that made speaking even more difficult. But he made a supreme effort, and when he heard himself saying, "No one in this house is going to die, Timothy," his voice seemed even calmer than Timothy's had been.

"I can't get free, Dad," Timothy said. "And Susan can't either. But if you go right back downstairs it may not kill you."

"Listen to me," Crewson pleaded. "Stop thinking. Can you do that? Try—make your mind a total blank. I'm not here, you're not here. You're in a different place and you've stopped thinking about anything. You're just waiting for something to happen. It's so wonderful, so certain to happen, you don't even have to give it a thought."

Crewson suddenly realized that he'd let himself forget that Timothy was only nine. Could a

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trance-like state, with all immediate awareness blotted out, be self-induced by a boy that young and bring about a change in his conscious thinking? If he failed to comprehend exactly what he was being urged to do—

Timothy seemed to understand, for his expression changed, and although he continued to look directly at his father an unmistakable look of remoteness began to creep into his eyes.

"You're far away, Timothy," Crewson murmured. "There's nothing to be afraid of, and you're being protected from all harm and you're not letting anything frighten you. You're thinking about nothing at all, because you know that thinking can make people unhappy for no reason at all."

It happened more quickly than Crewson had dared to hope. The beaked and darkly towering shape behind the web began to waiver and dissolve. First the shining beak vanished and then the ghastly bulk of the creature dwindled and fell away, until nothing remained of it between the web and the window but a few floating filaments of mist that took just a little longer to disappear.

The web vanished then, in a sudden, almost blinding burst of light and both children tumbled to the floor.

If Timothy had been shaken up by the fall or was still a little under the sway of the trance that had brought a look of remoteness into his eyes, he displayed no evidence of it. He was almost instantly on his feet, helping his sister to rise.

As soon as both children were on their feet Crewson hurried them out of the room without saying a word, gripping Timothy by the wrist and encircling Susan Jane's waist almost fiercely with his free arm. His only thought was to keep Timothy from talking about any part of what had happened until they were downstairs and out of the house and—

Timothy began remembering before they were half way down the stairs.

"Dad, for a minute I didn't know where I was. What happened—"

"You just now helped Susan to get up," Crewson told him. "You mean—you did that with your mind a blank?"

"I must have, Dad. How did we get away? It was going to kill me and Susan, and I told you—"

"Your mother may be badly hurt," Crewson said. "Think about that—nothing else."

They were at the bottom of the stairs now and Crewson saw with relief that Anne was coming toward them across the sun parlor. She was holding herself very straight and had the look of a fully recovered woman whose only emotion was one of overwhelming gratefulness.

She started to speak, but her voice broke and although Crewson knew how much time a family

(cont. on page 99)

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FRAGMENTARY BLUE

JACK DANN

Jack Dann will be remembered by readers of this magazine for his stunning "Junction" (November, 1973), a study in surreality which earned him nomination to the final ballot for the SFWA's *Nebula Awards. Now he returns with another vision of surreality . . . in which we follow Fleitman through his pilgrimage from old age to youth, death to birth . . .*

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

EIGHTY-THREE BOOKS, half that on psychology, were reflected in the antique silvered miror. All out of date. Fleitman had stopped trying to keep up on anything long ago—these books were only a part of his ritual. I never liked to read, anyway, Fleitman told himself. And the television had never been enough, even with cerebral hook-ins. He had stopped paying rent on the tiny machines when he had started to enjoy feeling the commercials. He could not rationalize having an orgasm over a cigarette advertisement.

Fleitman rested his forehead on the mirror: two clouds formed under his nose. If only you could forget where you are. If only you were young. But you should be content, Fleitman told himself. It is safe and calm here; there are no young people to intrude. Fleitman leaned back in his chair and smiled at himself in the mirror. He remembered when his professional degree had become obsolete. He remembered forty more years of soft jobs, jobs he could handle, jobs where his education and experience would be useful. He remembered working as a module superintendent.

Fleitman lit a cigarette and watched the smoke curl before his face. He experienced a vague sexual sensation. But he would not permit himself any more synthetic pleasures. He glanced around his room, all the familiar objects in their proper places, everything clean, ready for tomorrow. But the whole place will change, he thought—after this generation dies out. And you'll be dead.

Mercifully, the phone rang. A very white, wrinkled face appeared in the wall hollow; it smiled and without waiting for a customary greeting said, "You have a meeting, Professor Fleitman. Have you forgotten?"

Bitch, Fleitman said to himself.

"The Entertainment Committee is waiting for you. Shall I tell them you'll be right there?"

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Fleeitman watched his expression in the mirror. "All right. Tell Taylor I'll be there as soon as I get dressed."

"But you're already dressed, sir."

Forty years ago she might have had breasts, he thought, instead of dried up gunny sacks. Where had he heard of gunny sacks? No image came into his mind. "Tell them I'll be there when I dress, Mrs. Watson?"

Fleitman was happy that a meeting had been called. He needed the company, and a good argument would clear his head. And, as usual, everyone would end up hung in the feelies, Fleitman thought. He felt an urge to join them. No, he thought, and tried to forget about it. He felt squeamish about leaving his room.

He took a shuttle to the park. It would be a short leisurely walk to the conference building. And he could forget all that mass above him, pushing down on his thoughts by its mere existence. As was prescribed, there was a thin drizzle. Fleitman had forgotten his raincoat, but the cold little bites of rain felt good on his arms and chest. His shirt clung to his skin.

The park stretched out before him. Haze hung in the trees and connected them into a pale ceiling supported by an undergrowth of frozen arms and legs, gnarls for chests and branches for limbs. A yellow chalk road sliced through

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the wall of trees. Fleitman did not look at the sky-scrapers behind him, steel stalagmites reaching toward the bright surface of the dome above. The sunlights—the thousand eyes of the sphere that surrounded and supported the underground city—were turned on full. The sun-shower had been scheduled to last for an hour.

Fleitman walked along a causeway near the edge of the park and listened to the shuttle trains passing below him. The sidewalk enclosure shielded him from the rain. He watched a crowd waiting to step onto a slidewalk ramp. They were all wearing raincoats. Fleitman was repelled by their age, by their once soft skin that had turned to parchment. Fleitman touched his own face. He left the park—it was a five minute walk to the Entertainment Building. Like a somnambulant, Fleitman edged his way though the crowds, ignoring them. He took an escalator into the building and then an elevator to his floor.

He paused for a few seconds in front of the conference room door, inches from the sensing line. He kicked at the air and the door slid open, revealing five old men seated around a polished metal table.

" 'bout time," Taylor said. He was seated at the far end of the table. "Christ, waiting for you for. . ."

Jake, who was sitting to the left of Taylor and opposite Sartorsky, said, "Sit down, Fleitman. We've got a great idea." He nodded at Sartorsky, who was studying his distorted reflection in the metal tabletop. Sartorsky's breath clouded the reflection. "Remember the old screen movies?" Jake continued. "I mean you've heard of them."

Fleitman straightened his back to gain a few more inches height. Relax, he thought. They're sitting down. He rested his palms against the back of the chair. No need to stand up, you old bastards.

"The rules of order prescribe. . ."

Good, Fleitman thought. Jake is going to be trouble. That will give me some time to think.

"What are the rules of order?" asked Sartorsky.

Sartorsky's blind, Fleitman thought. He fought down a gleeful urge to pull the black visor band from his eyes. "First of all, I received no notice at all of this meeting. Why was that?"

Tostler, who was sitting beside Fleitman's chair, winked at him. Fleitman had never seen him before. He was younger than the rest of the men. Fleitman ignored him.

"It was posted," said Toomis, who was sitting opposite Tostler and to the left of Fleitman.

"And you also got a call from me yesterday," Taylor said. "What the hell else do you want?"

"Out of order," Fleitman replied. An idea was forming. "Out of order you sonovabitch." Everyone was playing the game,

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but they would not give Fleitman more than five minutes.

"Sit down Fleitman," Jake said. "Listen for a minute. Sartorsky, over here, came up with a great idea." Jake looked at Sartorsky, but he was still looking down at his reflection. "It's good for the whole Goddamm sector, good for a couple of months at least."

"It stinks," Taylor said. "People want a feelie or, at least, a hook-in." Toomis nodded in agreement. Tostler smiled at Jake, waiting for him to reply.

Sartorsky looked up from the table. "Let me tell it myself. It's my idea."

"Shut up," Jake said. "I'm doing this for you." Tostler nodded in approval; Fleitman was not listening.

Popcorn, Fleitman thought. What the hell was popcorn? Popcorn—movies—dried gunny sacks. The words were there before the images.

"Let me tell this," Sartorsky said, propping his knee against the table and pushing his chair back. "It is a good idea. We could show a few screens a week for recreation."

"Movies," Toomis said, "not screens." Taylor grinned.

"Right, movies. There weren't that many that were available to us. We couldn't get anything popular." He held up a notebook. "These are the titles we can get right away: *Blood of the Artist* by Cocteau; another one—it's only fifteen minutes—by Dali, but I can't read the title; another one by. . ." He passed the notebook to Jake.

"Disney. Says it's a cartoon. What the hell is a cartoon?"

Cartoon. I'm getting near it, Fleitman thought. Little children running around, balloons. What's a balloon? Talking, laughing, gasping, whispering. Sideshow. Sonovabitch.

"Well anyway," Jake continued, "there's a lot of them here." He passed the notebook to Fleitman.

"This is interesting," Tostler said. "*Freaks.*"

"What's that?" Fleitman asked. Freaks. That felt right. Fleitman tied it into popcorn and gunny sacks. It still did not work. Soon, he thought.

"It's no good," Taylor said. "People won't give a damm about these movies, not without, at least, a hook-in. It has to be a feelie, or something like it."

"People want something different," Sartorsky said, tracing a line over his reflection with his index finger. "They don't have to experience everything through a feelie. People want something else."

"Do you?" Toomis asked.

Sartorsky flushed. "You know why I use the feelies. Let me put out your eyes and we'll see how well you can see with a visor band."

Taylor smiled at Toomis and relaxed in his chair. Fleitman was still standing, his palms red from his weight. He stood up straight.

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"So what do you think, Fleitman?" Jake asked. "The girls should like it; hell, they suggested it, didn't they?"

Sartorsky grimaced.

It's not that easy, Fleitman thought. He could go one better; if not, he would side with Sartorsky. Fleitman could outyell Taylor. His ideas were still fuzzy, but a word came to mind and he blurted it out: "Circus. We can have a circus. That's better than a movie, that's almost real."

"What the hell is a circus?" Jake asked.

"Shut up, Jake." Animals, Fleitman thought. Pictures began to form in his mind. "We can pull thirty floors out of the rec building. Christ, it's a module, isn't it? The big top will be burlap." He had once filed this information, but he could not remember when or for what reason.

"What's burlap?" Sartorsky asked.

Tightrope walkers, lion tamers, trapeze artists, clowns. From a book? Horses jumping through hoops.

"What's wrong with the movie idea?" Jake asked.

Fleitman ignored him and sat down. Everyone was watching Fleitman.

"I know what a circus is," Tostler said. "It's like the movies, only closer to a feelie. The movies, I think, are flat. A circus is live people performing tricks. You can't get inside the performers, but you can watch them right in front of you. Not like on a board."

Jake was silent.

"Is this thing a feelie?" Taylor asked.

Fleitman did not look at him; he looked at the wall over Taylor's head. "No, Stephen. It's not a feelie. You just watch it; the excitement is watching the other people, fearing for them."

"What people are you going to ask to perform? Is it dangerous? It must be, if it's as exciting as you say."

"No one performs. It's a projection." That would work, he thought. He would give in a little.

Taylor laughed and Toomis tittered. "Then," Taylor said, "it can be worked as a feelie."

"No," Fleitman said. "Then you lose the fun of being a spectator. And you lose the enjoyment of being with other people."

"We'd better do the movie," Jake said. "It's the middle of the road."

"It is not." Taylor said.

Fleitman allowed the badinage between Taylor and Jake to take its course. "O. K.," he said, "we can hook-in the seats. Those who want cerebral hook-ins can have them, and those who just want to watch can do so."

"But why not a feelie?" Toomis asked.

"Because I want people to be in one place together. I don't want them isolated from each other in a feelie. I want them to smell each other, to touch each other."

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"Why?" Taylor asked.

"Why are you in this meeting?"

"But that's almost the same thing we wanted to do."

Sonovabitch, Fleitman thought. "No it wasn't, Jake. You would have used private screens or borrowed television time."

"Without hook-ins," Toomis added.

Sartorsky nodded his head. It was over, another meeting would be called to find out what had been settled, and Fleitman would begin on the circus. Alone. Everyone began talking at once. Jake started an argument. Fleitman doodled with his forefinger on the polished steel.

"Speaking of feelies," Tostler said, "why don't we all go down and hang?"

Fleitman nodded to Tostler and smiled. Get them the hell out, he thought.

"The hell with it," Jake said. "Then let's go down to the feelies. Everyone agreed?" It was always the same: the feelies and to bed. "Are you coming, Fleitman?"

Taylor played along. "Of course he's not coming. That's not the real thing, is it, Fleitman?"

"Either is his circus," Jake said.

But that's closer, Fleitman thought. He made a fist and extended his index finger. The room had become too dense. He counted the men as they left; Tostler was last. No courtesies—they had not even been introduced. That was Taylor's fault. But why didn't Fleitman ask? The door slid closed; Fleitman felt elated in the empty room. He looked forward to the work ahead; he could delegate permission formalities to the secretaries. They had probably changed the system again. He smiled. But not that much.

What the hell. The building will probably be razed within the decade. Why not an amphitheater for a day? The big top. The classic show of shows. And actors of actors?

He would busy himself with his secretary. That should build up anticipation and keep the walls at their proper distance. He tapped out her number on one of the table phones. Her face appeared in the wall hollow before him. He leaned his elbows on the table. Thanks for the idea, gunny sacks. A tick in her temple snapped in and out as she worked her mouth.

A generalized tape on the feelies. Bring back Mary. Bring back a body that felt right, not too loose on the bones. Skin pulled tight on your face—supple, won't crack when you smile. Fleitman suppressed these thoughts; submerged they became anxiety. Projection isn't real; it's an excuse for a feelie.

"No, Mrs. Watson. It shouldn't take more than a day." Her tick snapped in and out a few times.

"Then quit, Goddamm it." Very good, Fleitman. Suck in your skin. Feel good. Stop the pressure, push out the walls, take in a feelie. Don't think about it. A tape can make you anybody.

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A-n-y—B-o-d-y.

Go. The whole morality had not been working very well. He walked down the hall to the elevator. The doors slid open before him. No good, he thought. You should get help. Fleitman, you're confusing morality with hard-on and you're too old for either. Fleitman had pushed the wrong floor button. He tried not to move his lips when he talked to himself. He sucked in the tick pounding in his cheek.

The elevator door opened and Fleitman walked past the feelie room. The door was open. Exhibitionists, Fleitman thought. He could turn around now. Say hello.

"I thought you didn't approve, Mr. Fleitman," Tostler said. "My name is Lorne Tostler; I'm sorry we weren't introduced." He shivered. "Cold."

"Then use a robe."

"Uh, uh. Why use a cotton prophylactic?"

What's a prophylactic? Fleitman asked himself. You know, idiot. It's cotton that you don't know.

"I like your circus idea. Taylor refuses to recognize it, but the feelies don't permit enough freedom. You always know that you're twice removed from the action. Even when your emotions are juiced, you always know. But all that coming from you. After what I heard about you. . . The circus idea reminds me of a place called the *Circus House* in Santa Balzar."

"I think I've heard of it," Fleitman replied. "In Ecuador, I believe."

"It was the only house in the city where you could get away with losing two kidneys at roulette. Illegal everywhere else. Had quite an operating room set up. They also had a bordello called the *Slave Market*. Made for a good house. It was so dammed realistic, you talked Latin." He pushed his hands through the padded loops and watched the hollow in the wall opposite him.

He didn't wait for Fleitman to leave. He had stepped into the stirrups, rested his back against the long supporting pad that stimulated his spinal nerves, and activated the tape. His arms were already moving, reinacting a prefabricated motion, caressing a smooth face. His knees were buckling, and he looked as if he would collapse. He stared at the hollow, catching the electric impulses through his retinal wall, transmitting them through his optic nerve to his brain. The spinal pad quickened his heartbeat and at the moment was providing vague feelies of pleasure accompanied by a prescience of danger.

Fleitman found it difficult to breathe. But Tostler was smiling, then laughing. His torso cracked in a spasm of laughter. Then tears: rich, oily baubles. Made of plastic, Fleitman told himself. He backed out of the room swallowing his guilt.

He walked to the nearest elevator. Fleitman had just dese-

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crated Mary. But she was pulp, anyway. Thoughts of Mary spiderwebbed into bizarre images. But, he thought, everyone always went to the feelies after a meeting. At least they all said they did. No. They did. He had passed this room before. Don't think about that. Then why was Tostler the only one there? And why was there only one feelie? There should have been ten racks.

He pushed the elevator button. *There were ten racks.*

FLEITMAN researched the circus from its birth in Rome to its end in Russia. He was fascinated with Astley, the former sergeant Major, who traced the first circus ring while standing on his horse's back. Fleitman would make the horses and their famous riders the major event of the circus. There would be a North, a Robinson, a Ducrow, a Salmonsky from the Baltics, a Carre, and a Schumann. And there would be a Philip Astley, surveying the acts around him, genuflecting to the great Koch Sisters performing on a giant semaphore arm. But the program could not be too outre. No one would care if the details were authentic or not, but for the sake of aesthetics he would do it correctly: First the overture played on a thousand horns, then the voltige, strong man, trained pigeons, juggling act, liberty horses, clown entree—how many clowns?—and a springboard act. And then he could have an intermission while popcorn and pretzels, beer and coke, ice cream and cotton candy were being passed out by red nosed old men. (They would have to stay the same, he thought. Might be tricky.) The intermission ends with an aerial act—all the greats on the trapeze: the Scheffers, the Craigs, the Hanlon Voltas. He would leave no one out—Sandow, Lauck and Fox, Cinquevalli, Caicedo, and the Potters would all be there. Then the wild animal act (Van Amburg could put his head in a lion's mouth), the wire walker, one hundred performing elephants, trick riding, and a finale of clowns. There were other choices: springboard acts, hand to hand balancers, artists on the rolling globe. But he had to stop somewhere.

Fleitman felt confident that he could reproduce a circus. And set it askew and ruin it. But it would be a perfect conception: the greatest show on earth. This is going to be real, he thought. It will breathe with realism; I'll forget I made it. But he knew that it was all wrong, too much to rationalize. Fleitman held the wand; he could direct his own purgation.

Fleitman spent most of his time four stories below street level in the computer complex of the Entertainment Building. The small stark room where he worked seemed to grow warmer each day. Fleitman knew that this was impossible: the temperature was

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equalized on all levels. He worked in his underwear, constantly wiping his perspiring forehead with his wet forearm. The computers reproduced and projected all the circuses Fleitman had scanned earlier, superimposing one set upon another, suggesting proper costumes, proper colors, proper periods.

But Fleitman loved contrasts: He matched Roman Gladiators and Victorian ladies, made the orchestra impossibly large, had the computers compose special music for the overture and finale. He exaggerated the clowns until they looked quite inhuman—short hair, long paste noses, cauliflower ears, exaggerated fingers and toes. Some were dwarfs, others were giants, and all were painted with bright colors—orange lips covering an entire jaw, accentuated age lines drawn in ochre, burnt sienna moles, a beard of raw umber, baked blue buck teeth. He rejected the colosseum schematics and insisted on five stages surrounded by a hippodrome track, canvass walls, and wooden posts. The more changes randomly made, he thought, the more authentic it would become. He twisted the computers' suggestions into travesties as he giggled and wiped his forehead. His best idea had been to set a small fire in the tent during one of the high wire acts. That would give the aerialists a chance to show their mettle.

Fleitman carefully created the performers, all manifestations of himself. He molded their emotions, exaggerated their possibilities. All pictures in an exhibition, all self portraits. But he was careful to vary their physical appearance.

The computer room grew smaller each day as it filled with wraiths, painted clowns, and old acquaintances. Mary remained silently at his elbow, complementing him on a good idea, shaking her head at a bad one. A midget gleefully mimicked him. He stood directly behind Fleitman, always out of sight; but Fleitman sensed his presence.

The room became more crowded. All the young men from his first job lined the walls. An old student roommate crouched on the floor. The juggler had left all of his pins and plates in the middle of the room where Fleitman needed to work. The juggler's assistant was making love with the strong man: it did not arouse Fleitman. Fleitman did not look up when the door slid back with a hiss. It was probably the blacksmith working his bellows.

"We haven't seen you lately, Mr. Fleitman," Tostler said, taking off his sennet straw hat. Fleitman glanced up at him and scowled. "I've begun to dress for the circus." Tostler always smiled when he spoke.

The room had emptied. The midget had disappeared; Fleitman could sense it. Suddenly, he felt

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exhausted and uneasy. Fleitman felt a chill; the temperature seemed to be falling.

"I hope you're ready for tomorrow," Tostler said. "Sartorsky's all excited. He thinks the set up is wonderful."

Fleitman did not remember showing Sartorsky anything.

"—And your friend Jake died."

Tostler's gums are blue, Fleitman thought.

"—You can still have a good-by, if you like. Sartorsky, Taylor, and Toomis are having a party for him. They hooked a feelie into him."

Fleitman felt sick; he swallowed a lump of vomit. He remembered dead Ronson begging him to stop. Artificial men are better company, Fleitman thought. The room had become too important to him. "After Ronson, I thought we decided. . . ."

"Always exceptions. It doesn't seem to bother younger people; it never bothered me to hook-in with anybody."

It will, Fleitman thought as he vomited all over the juggler's equipment. He did not hear the door slide shut, but Mary was laughing at him. He told her to be quiet; he told her he was sick; but she continued laughing. And then the low bass of the weightlifter joined her laughter, and others joined in as they reappeared: the cowboys, the clowns, the aerialists, the midget, the red head with her marionettes, the fat lady, the man with two heads, the snake woman, the popcorn man, and Tostler.

Fleitman returned to his apartment early and fell asleep. He would have to be alert for the first performance. He would eat tomorrow.

FLEITMAN ARRIVED EARLY. He sat on the uppermost tier and waited for the spectators. He had planned it all perfectly, even to the smell of horse dung in the stalls. In the center ring a tightrope walker was doing knee bends while five men in coveralls slung a net under the high wire above. Three acrobats were jumping on a trampoline in the right corner of the center ring, their mascot hound crooning each time they shouted *hey*.

Everything seemed so real, Fleitman thought. He could not completely believe that it was only an illusion. The popcorn man yelled at him, and threw him a box of popcorn. The box was made of transparent plastic and was warm to the touch. This did not feel right, although the computers had proven to him that it was indeed correct. Fleitman could smell the stink of the man. It was perfect.

A fight broke out in the side ring between the juggler and the unicycle clown. They were both immediately fired by the manager. This was one of Fleitman's touches—the computers would not fill in such a detail on their own.

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The seal trainer ignored the fighting and firing, he shouted at his seals, promising them no food unless they came out of the water. They were a main attraction. He threw them a fish; it disappeared with a snap. Fleitman knew that if he were close enough, he would be able to smell the fish, a tart, stinging odor. He had made sure of everything.

Illusion, he thought. It can be rationalized. It's healthy. Forced feelie. Enjoy it. Don't hook-in.

A few people came into the tent and looked for the best seats. Two old ladies sat down in front of him, giggling and hoisting their imitation leather skirts above their thighs. Fleitman looked up at the trapeze.

An hour later the tent was almost filled. A half hour after that, the tent was filled to capacity. Folding chairs were quickly provided for latecomers. Another one of Fleitman's touches: it would be authentic.

Fleitman watched an old man squirming on his bench, fiddling with his hook-in apparatus. Soon, they would all be searching for their hook-ins.

Then the horns blared, and fifty, red uniformed Cossacks rode into the center ring, screaming and vaulting on and off their horses. One fell: it was not an accident. The next act was the strong man, and then the trained pigeons. Fleitman had substituted flying reptiles for effect. An acrobat, who had replaced the juggler, kept dropping balls; and the crowd hissed and booed and screamed and laughed. He could even blush.

When the clowns came out to announce the intermission, Fleitman had finished three boxes of popcorn. The clowns were well disguised, but too many of the performers resembled a younger Fleitman. An oversight, Fleitman thought. It would soon be over. It didn't matter. He threw popcorn at the clowns.

The second part of the program began with a wild animal act in the center ring, flanked by hand to hand balancers and perch performers. An aerial act was performing above the right ring; below, a chain of elephants were bowing to a screaming audience. Fleitman watched the trapeze artists. The young man was Fleitman. And the woman somersaulting toward him was young Mary.

The crowd screamed. There was no slap of powdered palms. The click was missing. She fell toward the sawdust mounds, toward the clowns staging a mock fire. Her scream was absorbed by the roar of the crowd. Of course, some people were laughing: "It's not real."

Fleitman was standing up, perched precariously on a wooden runner board. He did not see the man shaking beside him, trying to pull out the jacks of the hook-in console. Another fell off the bench, dangled for a split second,

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and then with a silent pop, fell twenty feet. The old ladies sitting in front of Fleitman were vomiting, splashing an old man below who thought it was funny.

This incident had not been planned. The safety net had been spread ten minutes before; Fleitman had watched. It had disappeared.

Two men dressed in white ran across the ring. As they swung her on the stretcher, the barker directed the audience's attention to the elephants. The men in white looked like Fleitman.

And then the springboard act, and more acrobats, and liberty horses. Out of order, Fleitman thought. The liberty horses should have been before the intermission. But the crowds were cheering again, hooking into their consoles, yelling at the handsome rider on a grey mare jumping through a flaming hoop. His saddle slipped, and he fell into the fire, straddling the hoop as his horse ran around the ring. Two men rushed toward him carrying blankets, but he ran away from them, his hair on fire.

Fleitman did not remember this. He counted the minutes to the finale. The small fire he had planned never occured.

It was overdue.

The barker was waving his baton, telling the spectators of the next show, as the clowns led the parade of performers around the hippodrome. The horses stepped high, the young girls atop them curtsying; the acrobats glistened with sweat; the strong man bunched his muscles (But he should not have been there); and the strippers stripped. The old ladies shouted and screamed, the old man disconnected their hook-ins and got up to leave.

"Not yet," Fleitman screamed.

The tent darkened, the performers disappeared, the walls became translucent, revealing offices and meetings in session. People began to sit down. Fleitman fumbled with his hook-in. He was nauseated. It didn't matter; it would soon be over. The last time.

Fleitman leaned back, resting his head on the tier above him. The illusion was precise; the walls narrowed, almost seemed to be moving. Above, a dot of light growing smaller. Fleitman screamed with the spectators. Vertigo. He was in an elevator shaft. He lost his balance. One of the old ladies in front of him died. The other gurgled, pulled down her skirt, and skipped from tier to tier. The shaft was telescoping, pulling the crowd into its maw. Fleitman held his hands against his ears and screamed.

HE DOES NOT remember this: he dreams that he is being swept toward the light. His heavy breathing echoes in the shaft, growing louder as it bounces from one wall to another. He awakens as he reaches the rim, as he opens his eyes to the glaring sunlight like an ant whose

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stone has been kicked away.

FLEITMAN WAS ALONE. The tent had disappeared along with the sawdust floor and wooden beams. Floors, walls, and ceilings had been hurriedly joined to accommodate all the meetings scheduled after the show. Fleitman had been taking up too much room; as he moved, two panels slid together behind him to form a larger office. A snatch of conversation, and then a click as walls met to fill the space, as other walls opened up.

He followed a glowing blue line through corridor after corridor. He listened to the echo of his footsteps along the metallic floor. Another echo. Tostler was walking beside him, his sennet straw hat in his hand.

"Sixty-seven heart attacks. Not bad, Mr. Fleitman. Old Toomis died too. No one really bothered with him; they just wanted to get out. And you fell asleep."

Fleitman could see the elevator at the end of the blue line. He walked faster, but Tostler took him by the arm and led him down another corridor.

"Where are you going?" Fleitman asked, trying to break away from him. "You're off the line."

Tostler giggled. An old lady ran past them and collapsed, her arms flapping like a bird. "She was running around the center ring just like that," Tostler said. "Around and around. It's a wonder she got this far."

Fleitman stopped walking, but Tostler put his arm around Fleitman's waist and dragged him along. "Where are you taking me?" Fleitman asked.

Tostler smiled and his dimples turned into furrows dividing his face. "Why, you're going to the surface. That's what your whole gig was for, right? And that elevator sequence was beautiful. Pure wish fulfillment. And this is it. The idea had come up to pin a paper note to your apartment door and turn off the sensor. You know, a written note on parchment. But this way is better, don't you agree?"

Fleitman did not want to go. They turned a corner. He could see an elevator at the end of the hall.

"They moved an old lady into your room," Tostler said. "She likes it quite a bit." His grip grew tighter on Fleitman's arm. "Why didn't you just ask to get out?" The elevator doors opened as they passed the sensing line. "Silly question." He pushed Fleitman into the elevator.

Fleitman didn't resist. He positioned himself in the middle of the elevator. The doors closed. Fleitman thought he heard "Good show. Come back and see us sometime," but he knew that sound could not pass through the closed doors. The books suddenly seemed very important to him. But they have probably already been transformed, he thought.

The elevator walls seemed to

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disappear, and Fleitman could hear his heavy breathing echo along the length of the shaft, growing louder as it bounced from one wall to another. He closed his eyes and waited for the surface light to redden the insides of his eyelids. He dreamed of grotesque clowns waiting at the surface to jump into the elevator as the doors opened and stab him with their rubber knives. Fleitman was shaking.

The doors slid open. Children were pushing against him, trying to get into the elevator. They were breathing heavily from running and perspiration glistened on their dirty faces. Fleitman stepped out, pushing children out of the way. The bright light hurt his eyes. The street elevator stood behind him, a huge grey monolith.

"What's that, what's that?" a twelve year old asked his playmate. She shrugged.

"We can't fit in there anyway," the little girl said. She turned to Fleitman and wrinkled her crinoline. "I'm Bozena Boobs. Do you want to do it?"

Fleitman did not understand her. He paid no attention to the children pulling at his hands and clothes. He kept shaking them off.

The buildings had risen much higher since he had been underground. And the sidewalk enclosures were shattered in places. The buildings, distorted by flaws in the enclosure plastic, blotted out the sun, formed their own grey horizon. Fleitman was dizzy. He thought of the levels of city beneath him, spiderwebs of corridors growing out of the dark like fluorescent spurs in a child's crystal garden. He felt suspended in the center of the city, and the heavy steel seemed to crush him from both directions.

The artificial light was too bright; it whitewashed the street and leveled the prominent features. The childrens' faces looked flat. Fleitman noticed that the slidewalks were not operating.

"Hey old man," screamed a boy dressed in a blue zip suit. "Catch this." He threw a plastic scrap at Fleitman, but missed.

"We've got to go," another boy said. "We can't wait. They'll catch us." He paused for breath and looked around at the other children. "Come on, let's go." He grabbed Bozena.

"Leave her alone," her playmate shouted, looking for a rock.

"I want to watch the old man," Bozena said.

"They can only take one of us anyway."

Fleitman thought he heard something in the distance: it sounded like the far away rantings of a mob. The children were growing in number, clustering around Fleitman. Fleitman guessed there were about forty children. A little girl was screaming and crying. "We've got to go. We've got to go. He can't help us."

The children took it up. "He can't help us, he can't help us."

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"He's a rag."

"He's a hag."

"He can't be a hag," a little girl said as she looked for something to throw.

There was a line of sediment around the buildings. Slowly, Fleitman thought, they were wearing.

"Bag."

"Scag."

"Fag."

Fleitman covered his face. They were throwing pieces of metal and garbage. A piece of yellow metal cut his face. They were chanting, "He can't help us, he can't help us, he can't help us."

"Rag."

"Scag."

"Hag."

"Glag," a crippled boy shouted.

"No good, cripple." More children joined in. "No good cripple, no good cripple," but it died quickly. They were all around Fleitman, wiping their dirty little hands on him, crying for help, spitting at him, caressing him, picking their noses, throwing stones, smoking cigarettes, coughing, giggling, belching. And a little girl kept screaming. "I'm afraid."

A piece of decayed food smacked against Fleitman's cheek. He felt it run down his neck into his high collar.

"Go back where you came from."

Fleitman ran around a corner. A rock hit him in the small of the back. The children easily stayed behind him, screaming and laughing, barely running. He crossed a street and turned into a main avenue. It was deserted, like the other streets, and the slidewalks were either broken or shut off. Fleitman noticed a large piece of plastic from the sidewalk enclosure propped against the side of one of the buildings. Three stories of window glass was broken.

There were about sixty children behind him now. His back had become numb. He felt a sharp pain in his chest as he inhaled. He sagged forward, his head lolling as he ran, his torso bent over.

Fall down. That's easy. They'll grind you, they'll crush your face.

He turned another corner. No garbage, he thought. No people. He couldn't see any windows in the buildings.

He stopped. A large crowd was pushing down the avenue. The children were behind him, the screaming adults before him. But the children turned and ran, and the crowd broke over Fleitman as so many waves in a hypothetical ocean.

Someone grabbed Fleitman's arm, but Fleitman broke loose, tripping over a young woman who had fallen down. Blood was welling from the collar of her zip suit.

The crowd was pushing Fleitman along. He was a dancer trying to keep his balance on an undulating floor. A young man waved to Fleitman and screamed,

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"This is a good one. Isn't this a good one?" He looked like Tostler. Fleitman noticed a number of men were wearing black robes, their hoods thrown back to reveal cropped hair.

The crowd stopped running, and Fleitman began to feel the ache of his new bruises. One of the children had been caught by the crowd. A little freckled boy kicked and shouted as he was handed from one person to another atop the crowd. Fleitman could not see any more of the children.

"This one, this one," screamed a young man next to him. Fleitman ducked as they passed the boy over his head. He thought he heard a voice whispering in his ear, more vibration than speech.

"What are you doing?" Fleitman asked the man next to him. The man wore a black cloth robe and his face was flushed with pimples and sores. He looked puzzled. "Well, you're in it," the man said, "aren't you?"

"In what?"

"You mean you don't know? Then. . ."

The man was waving his arms. Fleitman allowed a few people to scramble beside him. The man was soon too far away to be a nuisance.

Fleitman listened. The murmuring in his head was barely audible; he could make it out. He could see the man in the robe grinning at him: it was Tostler.

The voice: *Do not unite yourselves with unbelievers; they are not fit mates for you. What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial, or a believer join hands with an unbeliever? Can there be a compact between the temple of God and the idols of the heathen? And the temple of the living God is what we are. God's own words are: 'I will live and move about among them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'*

This is brought to you by. . .

Someone took a shot at the little boy. He was sitting on the priests' hands, his legs crossed in a lotus position.

"Well, he's imposing enough."

"He should make it into his thirties."

"Not that way."

A few more shots. An explosion. The little boy was crying and trying to break loose. The priests held him tightly, pressing his legs in place, crossing his arms. The crowd was howling, about to stampede. Fleitman saw a few of the children. They seemed to be enjoying the show.

Fleitman pushed his way to the edge of the crowd. He had only a few minutes before the crowd would break, pushing itself in all directions, crushing everything in its way.

"He's nothing without thorns."

Fleitman pressed himself against the building, merged with its greyness.

A few more shots. A priest's

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face exploded. Laughing children, dimmly perceived. Fleitman closed his eyes: if he couldn't see them, they couldn't see him.

The crowd chased itself, unable to decide the fate of the new king. The screaming softened, and the crowd disappeared into the perspective lines of the street.

The shadows were all wrong—De Chirico's *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street.* Of course the shadows were wrong. Fleitman waited for the little girl to appear from a shadow, pushing a hoop before her. And shouting, "I'm Bozena Boobs. Do you want to do it?"

Fleitman began to walk. He would look for other people. The eyeless buildings stood above him, watching him, not yet ready to topple over and crush him.

Kicking a plastic package of refuse out of the way, he turned a corner. The slidewalks were working. He stepped on the ramp and watched the buildings turn into a blured grey wall. An old woman carrying packages stepped on in front of him. And another. Then a young boy and a few teenagers. A couple was holding hands beside him. A prostitute nudged his arm. He skipped to a faster ramp. But the slidewalk had become crowded. It was difficult to breathe. Pushing people out of his way, Fleitman worked his way to an exit ramp. He stepped off, ignoring the beggars and pimps.

The buildings were drab and undistinguished, but the smells were overpowering: defecation, spoiling meat, incense—orange, tabac—perspiration, exhaust fumes from makeshift engines. The foodstuffs piled behind vendors' barricades were acrid and sweet—candies and oils, synthetic fruits and fetid sweetmeats. Fleitman watched three girls dancing on a podium in the street, their bodies oiled, electric tattoos decorating their paste white skin. To his right, a respectable little shop with an imitation wood portico. A pleasure ring was drawn around the large shop window to entice shoppers. Over the door an antique sign blinked on and off. Fleitman couldn't understand the lettering.

A balding huckster sat in front of the store and passed out loaves of burnt bread. A little girl walked toward Fleitman. She was furiously tearing a small loaf apart and stuffing it into her mouth. Fleitman remembered the food machine in his apartment. He wanted a piece of bread: its ugliness made it appetizing. The little girl walked past him, her hair crawling with tiny silver bugs.

Fleitman looked for a slidewalk, but most of the secondary walks were not operating. He passed street after streets of markets, carnivals, and whorehouses—all intersperced with module office buildings and expensive shops. There should be more modules, Fleitman thought, not less. There probably were: this might be an isolated fad.

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"Over there." The little girl had been following Fleitman. Crumbs of bread clung to the front of her dress. "There's something good over there. Come on, I'll take you. I'm old enough." She caught up with Fleitman, but he walked faster and she fell behind. "I can't keep up. I'm a cripple."

Fleitman slowed down. She limped as she walked; her right leg was shorter than her left. Why didn't I notice that before? Fleitman asked himself. Maybe it's not the same little girl. Fleitman was unconvinced.

"Turn left here. Come on, I know where it is."

"Where what is?"

"Right here," she said. "I'll show you."

Fleitman breathed through his mouth: she smelled. She led him into a crowd of people. Fleitman was nauseous.

"See, look up at the building."

A young woman was standing on the seventh story window ledge of an old building that had been partly torn down. There was a space between the buildings. The sky was a grey mouth that had lost a tooth.

"All these buildings are old," the little girl said. "They started tearing them down. I watch them do it all the time. I like it; it's always the same."

The woman on the ledge was laughing and screaming at the spectators. She looks like Mary, Fleitman thought. He knew that it really was Mary. Her face was thinner than he had remembered. She was young, about twenty-seven. And she was suntanned, as always. Probably under a light, but he remembered the citizens' beach at Cannes; he remembered digging old beer cans out of the sand. Her hair and earlobes had been removed. She pointed at Fleitman and laughed.

The crowd was egging her on. Someone took a pot shot at her. She laughed and waved her arms. There was only one refreshment man running in and out of the crowd; he was hurriedly doing as much business as he could before news leaked out and other vendors arrived. He was selling red hots. The little girl bought two.

"Come on and eat one," she said. "This is a good one, isn't this a good one?"

Fleitman watched Mary. He pushed his way to the edge of the crowd. The little girl followed him.

"We better move, you know. She's going to jump soon."

"We've got to help her," Fleitman said.

"Why? She's having a hellova time. Look at her."

She was making obscene motions at the crowd. The crowd began to scream "Do it now" in unison. Fleitman heard himself whispering with them. The little girl was jumping up and down.

Mary closed her eyes and held her arms out in front of her.

"Open your eyes," Fleitman screamed. He knew when she

(cont. on page 99)

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YOUNG NURSE NEBUCHADNEZZAR

"The other day," Richard A. Lupoff writes, "I had a call from the Oakland Police Department. They'd found this crazed old crone wandering in the Safeway parking lot, mumbling incoherently to herself. One whiff of her breath (phew!) and she landed in the Ladies' Drunk Tank. But a couple of days later, when they had her dried out, she seemed battier than ever. She had no identification, but somewhere in her incoherent maundering she apparently dropped my name. So they phoned me up, I drove down there in my Pierce-Arrow Phaeton and collected the old broad, and when we got home she insisted on dictating her yarn into my cassette recorder . . ." Thus was born yet another of Ms. Hamlet's infamous stories for this magazine. This one may make more sense if you've read any of Rene Layfayette's Old Doc Methuselah *stories (which originally appeared in the 'golden age'* Astounding*)—or perhaps if you are aware that "Lafayette" was a penname for Scientology-founder L. Ron Hubbard—but, then again, maybe not . . .*

OVA HAMLET

Illustrated by DAN STEFFAN

YOUNG NURSE NEBUCHADNEZZAR was sprawled back on the control couch of the *Autoclave* when the alarm bell rang. She would have answered it faster except she was very busy at the moment. She was playing the hundred-twenty-ninth verse of "The Symbiotic Cymballist of Symzonia" on the kalima—that took one hand—while juggling a pencil and a devilled-ham-on-rye as she munched on her lunch and scratched at the lyrics of the hundred-thirtieth verse—which was extremely *risqué*—and that occupied her other hand.

She was piloting the ship with her feet, tossing an occasional cursory glance at the instrument panel whenever she tired of seeking a rhyme for *navel* or for *intromission*. She was a very busy young nurse, although of course she didn't look very young.

The Association of Interstellar Nurses and Tarts—AINT, as it was generally known—had discovered all sorts of interesting and valuable medical stuff that it kept se-

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cret from the general populations of the multiple million inhabited worlds. And especially from the untrustworthy archrivals of AINT, the regular medical doctors who serviced the various worlds.

One of the things that AINT had discovered was the secret of keeping its members young over long stretches of years. Nurse Nebuchadnezzar, for example, had graduated from MIT (Milford Institution of Terminology) back on earth in the year 1936. And had a hard time at that. She'd had to masquerade as a boy, wearing a crewcut, smoking through a cigarette holder and developing a pot belly into the bargain.

Of course she hadn't been called Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar back then. She'd been known as Renée Lafayette, prettiest babe ever to hook for her hooch down at Scollay Square near Milford. Nowadays, some screen-teen centuries later, she was still only 26 years old. But she *looked* like seven hundred. Oh well, she sighed with a final plonk of the kalimba, you can't have everything.

She washed down the last of her devilled-ham-on-rye with a quaff of Ole Tomkat Brew and picked up the space-telephone.

"Med-ship *Autoclave*, Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar here, atcher service," she drawled, "ya got a problem a some kind?"

The voice on the other end of the space-telephone sounded terrified and beseeching. To sum-

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mon an AINT med-ship was a last resort, a desperation tactic for any planet. The members of AINT were known for the sour dispositions and arbitrary-conduct; they were an interstellar elite before whom all deferred and who gave orders to potentates, industrialists, even waiters.

They were called the Sour Tarts by some, but never to their faces.

The voice coming over the line said "This is terrible. Our whole planet—it's Farnum II, called Franklin hereabouts—is suffering from a terrible epidemic. We tried to get help from our local medics but they're all attending a convention in the planetary resort belt paid for by the Stringy Dinghey Steamship Line and Ethical Drug Cartel and none of them will be available until after the con."

"I see," said Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar penetratingly. "And who decided to call on AINT?"

"Our president," the frightened voice said. "President Washington Jefferson Burr. After consulting his cabinet, the Senate and House majority and minority leadership, the governors of the states and leaders of labor, industry, and the commissioner of the Nominal Bowling League, of course. This is a democratic planet and we aim to keep it that way."

"Florencenightingale!" Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar screeched in her piercingest voice. She wasn't talking to the person on Franklin, Farnum II, she was screaming at her slave, who was in the equipment and trophy room of the *Autoclave*. Whatever Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar was, she was a sportswoman. She loved sports even more than she loved men, and she loved men a lot.

"Yes-yes, missy Nebuchadnezzar," Florencenightingale whimpered as she emerged from the equipment and trophy room. Florencenightingale held Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar's bowling ball in one hand, a polishing cloth in another, one of her shoes in each hand and a can of polish in another, a softball mitt, frisbee, vanadium-diamond tipped javelin in another, a high-powered hunting laser, a football, and Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar's croupier's stick in another. She wanted to be ready for whatever Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar had in mind.

That took eleven hands, of course. Fortunately, Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar's slave Florencenightingale was an eleven-armed Procyonic proctopoid whom Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar had picked up at a slave auction some years before, for a song. An earlier version of "The Symbiotic Cymballist of Symzonia," in fact, played on a green plastic piccolo. It was a steal.

Florencenightingale was a very fine slave. Like all Procyonic proctopoids she had a tetrahydrocannabinol metabolism, and it

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had been Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar's intention to feed her up to a maximum weight of five hundred kilos and then dry and smoke her, but Florencenightingale had proved so helpful around the *Autoclave* that Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar had changed her mind. She kept her around the ship now to do things like polish the bowling balls, plot orbits and sing harmony on "The Symbiotic Cymballist of Symzonia."

"Ring off," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar commanded the trembling person on the other end of the space-telephone connection.

"You mean you're coming, your medicalness?" the person quavered.

"Shut up. I'm a member of AINT. A Cherub of Chimes. I go where I choose and do what I want. Potentates, industrialists and even waiters take orders from me. So hang it up, bub, and clear the tarmac. Or clear the line, kline, and bubble the hangar.

"Hey, that's pretty clever word-play," the young nurse crooned to herself as she slammed the space-telephone back onto its hook and picked up her kalimba again. She sloshed down some more Ole Tomkat and struck up the stirring strains of "The Symbiotic Cymballist of Symzonia."

Three days, eight hours, fifty-three minutes and nine seconds later the *Autoclave* sat in the middle of the formal garden beside the Presidential Bijou of Franklin Farnum II. Actually Florencenightingale had plotted a careful orbit for the ship, but Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar, sloshed on Ole Tomkat, had insisted on handling the landing herself and had ploughed up a half-mile of tarmac, wrecked a hangar or three, walloped the family wing of the Presidential Bijou (fortunately President Washington Jefferson Burr and his family had been touring a hospital ward at the time) and had come to rest in the middle of the garden.

She'd done at least $3.25 worth of damage, not to mention the human suffering she'd caused, but what the hell, as Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar so often exclaimed, she was a Cherub of Chimes and these frogging planet-wigs or frigging planet-wogs could just like it or lump it. If they didn't watch out she'd traffic-cite their whole planet, their whole solar system, their whole metagalactic hyperuniverse, she didn't give a peepeedoodoo, then let 'em complain about drunk spacing.

"Right, Flornsh?" Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar slurred.

"Right-right, missy," Florencenightingale simpered. She never disagreed with her owner. After all, she might have been a mere Procyonic proctopoid, but that didn't mean she wanted to be dried and smoked like a whitefish or a lox. "Missy want-want her

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boxing gloves? Mud-cleats? Plexible flexiglass paulting vole? Yes-yes, missy?"

"Just my bowling shoes and marbled three-holer. You know, the one with the secret disintegrator beam inside that gets a strike every time."

Florencenightingale disappeared into the equipment and trophy room while Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar popped a final Ole Tomkat and staggered out the *Autoclave's* port.

She looked, a trifle bleary-eyed, at the young man who stood at the foot of the disembarkation ramp to greet her. "Shay," she shlurred, "you're kind cute, fella. Howzabout we roll a couple lines tonight and then check out the bar scene together."

"Uhm, on behalf of the Planetary Council of Franklin, Farnum II, and President Washington Jefferson Burr, it is my pleasure to welcome you to our planet, Miss ah, Nebuchadnezzar."

The young man bowed and then held his hands out in a gesture of welcome.

"Sure, honey," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar drawled. "Where's the local lanes? Come on, Flornsh, and don't drop that ball or I'll have you dried and smoked for high tea."

"L-local lanes?" the young man stammered. "I—I don't understand. You are the Cherub of Chimes, aren't you? From the Association of Interstellar Nurses and Tarts?"

" 'At's right," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar cackled, " 'at's me all right! What's it to ya, kiddo?"

"B-but we're suffering from a planet-wide epidemic of some terrible disease. Over half the populace has it. Millions are dead or dying. Our world will be decimated. And all our doctors are at the convention sponsored by the Stringy Dinghey Steamship Line and Ethical Drug Cartel in the resort belt and can't help us.

"AINT is our last, best hope! You have to help us! Please!"

"Lishen, buster, I'm a Sour Tart, I do what I feel like. I'll help you guys out. *If* I feel like it. An' if I don't, I won't. I don't give a peepeedoodoo. So there."

"Maybe if you would condescend to talk to President Burr," the young man pleaded. Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar managed to get her eyes well enough into focus to see that he was himself in the early stages of the mysterious disease. His lymphatic glands were tubercular and sometimes his bones and joint surfaces were, too. He had suppurrating abcesses with inflamed tissues showing cheesy disintegration. All of this while he was still early in his life.

Oh, yuch!

"Sure you don't want to roll a couple of lines?" Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar asked.

"I'm very sorry, miss," the young man replied, "but I really don't feel quite up to it today. My suppurrating abcesses, you see.

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Inflamed tissues, cheesy disintegration, all of that. But if you would deign to see the president. . . ."

"Aw right," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar gave in, "bring him on and we'll go bowling later. The sacrifices I make for you wanet plogs are really sumpin', I hope you appreciate it, boy, cause I can just go peddle my secret medical knowledge elsewhere, you know. Just don't step out of line or I'll traffic summons this whole froogin space-time continuum, I don't give a good peepeedoodoo."

"Yes, ma'am," the young man murmured contritely.

Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar entered the Presidential Bijou and sashayed into the trapezoidal territory itself. The chief executive rose to greet her and she collapsed gratefully into his plush leather chair. "Phew," she said, "I'm kinda blown from the walk. Thanks for the seat, prexy. Where can a lady glom onto a can of brew around here? I'll take an Ole Tomkat if you get that out here in the sticks, otherwise a Griesedick, *hee-hee*—now don't you talk dirty to me, you dirty old man. Siddown and tell me everything. I'm a Cherub of Chimes, I give orders to everybody and don't hold nothin' back. Phew!"

The president cleared his throat preparatory to speaking. He was a tall, dignified man with gray hair and *pince-nez* hanging from a black ribbon attached to his lapel. His clothing was conservatively cut and colored. His face bore the lines of weariness and responsibility, and his voice the tones of a man driven to the limits of his resources.

"Madame," he began, only to be cut off by his visitor.

"Ain't been one of *them* for nigh onto squeedly years, kiddo," and she collapsed into wheezing laughter.

"Ah, yes," a ghostly attempt to smile flickered feebly over Washington Jefferson Burr's visage. "A joke, I see. How wonderful to be able to laugh at a time like this.

"Madame," he began again, hunched forward earnestly from the edge of the guest chair to which Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar had relegated him. "The planet Franklin, Farnum II, is suffering the worst epidemic in the history of the entire Franklin, I mean Farnum, system. We are brought to our knees. If you cannot help us, I fear it means planetary quarantine and soon afterward, racial extinction.

"We are a poor but honest people. We work hard at our farms and our factories, our government is frugal and democratic, we hold our heads up and our hearts beat proudly when we see the flag of our planet, its colors—"

"Hee-hee," cackled Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar, "you politicians are all the same. Look-a-here, sonny, I'll think

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about it. Meanwhile, I think I'm going bowling."

She stood up, leaving the astonished president nonplussed, and headed for a downtown bowling alley she'd seen on the way in from the ruined formal garden. But *en route* she stopped off at her med-ship, the *Autoclave*. As soon as she was inside its port she shouted at her slave Florencenightingale "Get me the good old s & v before I slice up your belly for lox, Florensh!"

The cunnin' little Procyonic proctopoid trotted to the ship's library, whimpering and pleading with each step not to be smoked and eaten for tea. "Yes-yes, missy," she wailed, "Spleens, Vapours and the Mischief of Troublesome Sprites, Theyre Causse, Nayture and Melioration by Plotchko Paraplappus, Wroclaw, 1553, you picked it up for a nickel at a garage sale on Beta Bleary XV, I remember your saying to me afterwards—"

"Shut up and gimme the goddam book, Florencenightingale," lipped Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar in her kindest tones.

The slave complied, whimpering and cringing.

Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar backhanded the proctopoid casually and opened the book on the control panel before her. With one hand she plucked idly at her kalimba while with the other she turned old parchment pages. At last she found the one she wanted.

"Ah-*hah*!" Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed unpleasantly, "I've got it. All I have to do is overthrow that simpy president and put in a new government of my choice for this planet and everything will be okay."

"Over-overthrow the gover-government, missy?" exclaimed Florencenightingale in alarm. "But-but that's against regs. The manual clearly states, 'No member of the Association of Interstellar Nurses and Tarts shall ever under any conditions, circumstances or provocation interfere in the governmental affairs of any planet, nor take part in or attempt to impose upon any duly elected democratic—' "

"Oh, peepeedoodoo, Florencenightingale," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar interjected, "I don't give a spodee-odee about regs, I'm a Sour Tart, a power unto myself, and I'll do what I damn well feel like and everybody else better jump to when I whistle. Now go get me a can of Ole Tomkat—the brew that dumb president served me isn't fit to soak my drawers in."

Well, the next day she was sobered up a bit but she had one godawful thumper of a hangover so Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar poured herself a brew to start the day off and strolled into town again, Florencenightingale in tow, carrying her owner's bowling ball and shoes in three of her hands, a high-powered hunting laser in

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another, the Paraplappus reference book in another, and a couple iced six-packs in case Nursey worked up a thirst.

Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar drew her classy solid-zirconium cloak around her scrawny shoulders and marched into the first bowling lanes she saw. They'd just opened for the day, and with most of the staff as well as most of the populace under the weather from the epidemic, it hardly took no time at all to get a lane. This was an old-fashioned town with human pinboys still working, and after Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar'd rolled a couple of lines—she turkeyed out for a 97 on her last game and she was in a good mood—she invited the pinboy to join her for a brew.

He came skipping up the gutter with an obsequious grin plastered on his face and after they'd hoisted a couple six-packs—Young Nurse drank her own Tomkat and the pinboy had to drink the local swill, but that was his lookout not hers—Ole Nurse gave the kid a pinch and asked how he'd like to have a little excitement.

The kid looked real pale and started to shake. He had a brush cut and a real mean look to him except he was scared now, he said his name was B. H. "Hube" Heuckinstiehl and his dad was a big-shot in the Stringy Dinghey Steamship Line and Ethical Drug Cartel. In fact, his dad was Stringy Dinghey Heuckinstiehl himself. B. H. "Hube" was working in the bowling alley to pick up pin money, and also to learn a thing or two about strikes in case he ever had to handle negotiations for the Line and Cartel.

Line and Cartel, that was what the folks inside called it.

"Fine and dandy, sonny," said Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar to B. H. "Hube," "come with me and we'll fix up this planet just fine."

She led him by the hand back to the Presidential Bijou, her proctoidal slave trotting behind wailing quotations from the AINT regs. When they got to the Bijou, Young Nurse marched straight into the Trapezoidal Territory and shooed President Burr out of his chair again. He'd been working very hard, studying medical and economic reports, signing legislation, drafting a speech he'd been planning to make, and generally applying himself conscientiously to the demands of his high office and heavy responsibilities.

Just minutes before he'd pleaded with Stringy Dinghey Heuckinstiehl at the pleasure resort, begging him to send some of the doctors home so they could treat the epidemic, but Stringy Dinghey had refused. He'd asked for a job at the Bijou for his son B. H. "Hube" around the Bijou, maybe for example as chief usher, and the president had taken the matter under advisement.

"Call in all the bigshots," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar commanded.

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Puzzled but awed before the titanic majesty of the Association of Interstellar Nurses and Tarts, President Washington Jefferson Burr did what anybody always did when he received an order from a Cherub of Chimes. He hopped to!

Quickly they assembled: the cabinet, the Senate and House majority and minority leadership, the governors of the states and leaders of labor, industry, and the commissioner of the Nominal Bowling League.

"Okay, kiddo," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar ordered the president, "I command you to give my friend B. H. 'Hube' Heuckinstiehl that job as chief Presidential Bijou usher. That makes him last in line of succession for the presidency, after all of the cabinet officers, the Senate and House majority and minority leaders, the governors of the states, the leaders of labor, industry and the commissioner of the Nominal Bowling League."

"It's done," the president stammered solemnly. He turned to his young aide. "Record that, son."

"It's done already, sir," the young aide replied.

"Now," Nursey growled, "uh, wait a minute. Florencenightingale, gimme a Tomkat!" She reached out one clawlike hand and popped a brew for herself. She sloshed down a couple of swallows and said "Okay, line em all up down t'other end of the trapezoid. Hop! Not you, 'Hube.'"

The president did as he was told.

"Okay, you too, prexy," Nursey said. "Let's just keep B. H. 'Hube' Heuckinstiehl up here, and this kid helper too." She pointed at the president's young aide.

The politicians and other leaders now stood in a triangular cluster down at one end of the trapezoid.

Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar reached toward her slave with one talon and took her bowling ball. She reached inside its finger-holes and flicked the switch to *total-destruct*. She took a couple of steps, made her backswing carefully and let the ball go toward the assembled leaders.

"Phew!" she exclaimed, "thought I was gonna loft it!"

The ball rolled unevenly into the pocket, knocked the feet out from under the number one and number three leaders. Then the detonation occured and the entire pack of leaders was vaporized in a single blinding flash.

"Hee-hee!" cackled Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar.

"Perfect strike, missy-missy," simpered Florencenightingale.

"That makes me president," exulted B. H. "Hube" Heuckinstiehl. "won't Stringy Dinghey be proud of me! All right, punko, kneel!" he commanded the presidential aide who stood nearby, aghast at the vaporization of Franklin, Farnum II's democrati-

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cally selected political and economic and bowling league leaders.

"Kinda sorry about the commish," Young Nurse conceded, "but what the hay. Lissen, 'Hube,' your being president ain't enough, y'unnerstand, that'll never cure anybody. Not according to good ole Plotchko Paraplappus. Tell ya what, kiddo, as representative of the Association of Interstellar Nurses and Tarst, uh, Tarts—hey, Flornsh, gimme another Tomkat—I hereby appoint you, uh, annoint you, uh, whatever the peepeedoodoo, king of this lousy little planet."

"Aw, that's swell of you, Nursey. Uh—what do I do now, though? I mean, ah—do I own *every*thing? The whole planet?"

"Sure, kiddo. Under my tutelage, of course."

"Wow, Nurse. Dad will be very proud of me. And—and I can tell him where to stick his lousy bowling alley and—"

"Watch it about the bowling alley, king. If it wasn't for my little special you'd still be low man on the totem pole."

"Um, I'm sorry, Your Nurseship."

"That's better. But now it's time for me to work my miracle of modern medical science. Hey, Florencenightingale, hand me an Ole Tomkat and one for my pal here the king, and let me see that Paraplappus for a minute."

She popped a Tomkat and sloshed down a couple good cold swigs while her rheumy young eyes examined the pages of the ancient text. "Yeah, that's right. Lissen, kiddo—no, not you, king, this flunky here."

The former presidential aide tried to look inconspicuous, but did not succeed conspicuously.

"Kneel in front of your king," Nursey said. "Okay, now, king, you touch him right there on the suppurrating abcess and say—"

"Do I have to?" King 'Hube' asked. "He's all yechy there."

"Do it, kid, or I traffic cite this whole dinky cosmos forever after."

"Well—"

"Remember Stringy Dinghey!"

"Yeah."

"Play along and I'll arrange the Ole Tomkat Brew dealership for the whole Farnum system for you. Franklin, Dustin, the works."

"Oh boy," the king gibbered, rubbing his greedy hands, "okay!"

Very, very gingerly he touched the cheesy disintegration of the other man. "Is that all I have to do?"

"Not quite. You have to repeat after me, 'In the name of the Association of Interstellar Nurses and Tarts, I King Hube do cure thee of the king's evil. Say it, dope."

The king did.

The former presidential aide rose and put his hands to his formerly tuberculous lymphatic glands, bones and joint surfaces. "I'm cured, I'm cured!" he cried

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gratefully. He fell to his knee and seized the king's hand to kiss it.

"Hey, watch who you're kissing, bub," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar croaked. "I was the one who put this twerp where he is and I can take him right back to the bowling alley if I don't like the way things run around here. Hey, kiddo?"

The king admitted that she was right.

"Okay, now let's sit down and work out the financial details of my override on this Tomkat Brew dealership. Then maybe we can roll a couple of lines before I have to take off in the *Autoclave*. We Cherubs of Chimes don't hang around much after a case is cleared up. By the way, king, you'll have to touch everybody on the planet who has that disease. Maybe you could charge 'em fifteen cents a head or something, it really mounts up. I know. Believe me you, kiddo, right?"

The king had to admit she was right.

Pretty soon, Florencenightingale unhappily in tow, Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar was down at the alleys, rolling strikes left and right. She was a good bowler, whatever else you say about the broad.

Next day, depositing a dazed king back at the former Presidential Bijou, now his royal palace and a wholly owned subsidiary of the Line and Cartel (Nursey had worked out a stock option deal with the king's dad by long-distance telephone).

Florencenightingale was carefully cleaning up the interior of the *Autoclave*, putting sporting goods away, filing reports for Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar, and trying to stay out of her owner's way so she wouldn't wind up dried and smoked for tea. From the captain's quarter's Florencenightingale could hear the mellifluous plonking of a kalimba and the croaking, discordant voice of Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar.

Nurse had finally worked out the hundred-thirty-first verse of "The Symbiotic Cymballist of Symzonia." The verse was highly autobiographical. It told all about how Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar had singlehandedly cured the entire planet of Franklin, Farnum II, of scrofula.

Suddenly the door of the captain's cabin opened and Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar came stumbling out. "Where's that old bitch Florencenightingale?" she demanded.

"Here-here, missy," the eleven-armed Procyonic proctopoid whimpered, "please-please no dry and smoke me for tea, missy."

"Ah, shut up and go plot an orbit for the Autoclave," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar rasped. "I'm tired of bumming around with these planet wogs. Let's head for deep space!"

She plunked herself into the pilot's couch, ponked a couple of

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random notes on her kalimba and punched the takeoff stud. The *Autoclave's* launching blast wiped out what was left of the already ruined formal garden.

"Besides," Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar wheezed under her breath, "that punk king couldn't bowl worth a damn!"

—Ova Hamlet
(Richard Lupoff)

Cottage (cont. from page 69)

reunion could consume he released his tight grip on Timothy and Susan Jane, and let them run straight into Anne's outstretched arms.

He wasn't sure he had done a wise thing, and spoke almost harshly to make his wife realize that all rejoicing must be cut short.

"We're getting out of the house and into the car and driving to East Windham right now," he said. "Timothy won't be needing the suitcase I told you to pack. He'll be having the time of his life at a boys' camp—camping, hiking, swimming—well into October. We can buy him everything he'll need in East Windham tomorrow. We may even get there today before the stores close."

Anne looked at him out of eyes swimming with tears. "You got to them in time," she said. "Nothing else matters. I'll miss Timothy. You know that. But if a boys' summer camp is what you worked out for him with Dr. Moorehouse I won't say a word."

"He couldn't be any more tanned than he is now," Crewman said. "But otherwise you won't know him when he comes back in October. He'll have a real rough-and-tumble look"

He gripped his wife's hand and pressed his lips to her cheek.

"Come on," he said, leading the way to the door. "We haven't a moment to lose."

The children followed.

"Thank you, darling," Anne said, as they passed out into the clear, bright sunlight.

—Frank Belknap Long

Fragmentary (cont. from page 87)

would jump; he had seen this already.

She leaned over the edge, her back arched. That's right, Fleitman thought. Very good. Fleitman noticed that he was screaming . Someone had drawn a pleasure circle around the crowd. Fleitman relaxed.

She jumped and fell in front of Fleitman, splashing herself on his slippers. He took a deep breath of her and counted the entrails before him. A good omen: the refreshment man had stopped selling red hots.

"You want the take a walk?" the little girl asked. She smiled at Fleitman. He looked back, impatient for something to happen, and took the little girl's hand: it was cold and dry.

He listened to an advertisement softly buzzing in his brain.

—Jack Dann

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DAVID R. BUNCH

David Bunch is perhaps best known for his stories of Moderan and related lands–a future elsewhere in which humanity has lost its flesh and all is mechanized and automated for The Greater Good. He returns now to Ironland, where yet another aspect of fleshly humanity meets its end with the–

END OF A SINGER

SOAL ACHLE chewed on at his bitter thoughts in the glow of the purple-vapor evening and watched the iron pansies nod on their spring-metal stems toward an Ironland night. He saw the tin birds wheel in the sky of the purple shield and heard the tin musicians play across two plastic yards, dueling with their strings. And he frowned at the quarrel music. Soal Achle had once been a poet of the heart-thought, a man of ultimate worth to those who cared, but now—

Had *they* ruined him with the zeal of their implants? When he lost his first flesh it was in the time of the iron-X replacements. Oh, they *all* were doing it then. It was *the thing!* And a poet, not wishing to seem too different from his fellowman, followed along. And no one could say it was not a help at first, the things he lost, and what he got for them. A plastic set of new clean auto-teeth in trade for some old curious muscle-biters seemed to change his thinking not at all. And when he had the arthritic legs and arms put by—oh, how they had ached him on the Central Seasons cold days!—for something more tireless and easeful, no one could say he could not still write a poem. But they didn't know when to stop! He did not know when to stop them! From substituting for the outlying things, they moved into the very heartland of Soal's soul when they replaced the great flesh-engine parts of him and tampered with his juices.

"This iron heart I've got—oh, it's not simply iron, you understand, but the refinement of all the weight of scientific thought in implant alloys for more than a thousand years—this iron heart pistons a steady rhythm day and night, and though I demanded and got a changer—most people don't want a changer—it is a poor damned substitute for a poet's heart. —So, some morning gay in May I'm seeing the iron birds cavorting on glinting wings above the mandolin men wildly fighting their strings in the 'clean' plastic yards where the pansy lids have popped up and great iron flowers have leaped through the yard holes of spring—some cog-wheel

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hand in Central having switched on the foliage tagged May—how am I to judge what degree the reaction? So I switch it, my heart, to ecstasy. Is that entirely justified by the fighting, the quarreling and the fingers playing the bird, the music and the flower keys in Central? And so, all right, all justification aside, I switch it, my heart, to ecstasy. What then? Do I know the mixes in the green-gray juices that have usurped my rightful blood-red blood will kick up correctly for a poem on flowers and birds and fighting-feuding mandolin men in May? *I do not!* More often than any other way I'll just feel cold, with that black bleak eye of the recorder staring at me and accusing, my voice hinges all oiled and ready, and—nothing to say, *no poem!*"

The brooding troubled Soal wondered if he should apply to Central Heart once more, asking that his changer be changed again. He had already tried that ten times, ten different changers with little success, but he had heard they were improved now, with a new elixir that seeped into the blood . . . Perhaps at news-up time tonight there would be some official word of a breakthrough in heart changers.

Yes, news-up time! Soal Achle felt a chill slip through his 'blood' pipes, an old old pang of dread along the tube-miles of his flesh-strips. News-up time was always a crisis for him, a time of trial and stark travail, because then they spoke mostly of the iron things where the heart was not—mentions of great advancements in techniques of killing at war, word of space probes, announcements of machines that were outthinking, many times over, the smartest of men. And then the rumor he had heard, the very serious rumor for more than a year now, the light banter and jokes about it for many years now. Sometime there was to be a monster, the ultimate ultimate ogre to a man of soul. So they said. Sometime! Oh, was it so? Oh, could it ever be so? *No! No!!* But tonight, this very night, there was to be an announcement concerning how far this tall beast had come, how close this dragon of change was to being born. Perhaps. *Yes!* The weekly Progress Report was due to tell that. Or so it had promised only a week ago. But maybe also they'd speak of changers, heart changers, tonight.

When the tin flowers had nodded evening west and into dusk, and the opposing mandolin groups had dueled the last quarrel measures of the day, when the big bar of light in the sky spelled PROGRESS across the vapor shield, it was news-up time in Soal Achle's town. the capital city, as it was news-up time across all Ironland. Even in the very correct temperature of the regulated breeze that soft spring night Soal Achle felt a chill; along the meager flesh he

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still owned foreboding seeped. He worked the Calmness settings of his heart-felt up five different times to higher notches before the fear and tightness completely left him. And that's how he took the news. Not with fear and excitement making him vibrant and stark did he take the news; not with rage and frustration and a high sense of wrong being done clapping through his heart did he take it. But relaxed like a lump he took the Announcements, his Calmness settings up so high he was but an iron clod.

The sky was a float-trip of light when the news came; a manufactured brightness made a white glow all around, and everyone could see across the yard sheets for many miles that night, and many were out in their yards that soft contrived springtime to take the news first-hand. It came from Central Say. The injured, the old, the tired, the lazy, the sick, the certain indifferent ones took the news on small viewers in their own personal buildings. But for those who were in their yards that night, the news came on a hundred miles up in characters ten miles long and half as wide, each letter like the light of a local sun seen through a colored lens. And they told of progress, for this was indeed the weekly Progress Report of Ironland. *Yes!* Toward the end of the Report, after many mentions of fine successes with space bombs, automated warfare, personality drugs, the great galactic probes and how a trick done with light could bore a hole to the center of the earth, they came to Culture, and a hundred exclamation points leaped there foretelling of a breakthrough. And then there came a hush; even the manufactured breezes sighed to little stillnesses as some cog-wheel hand in Central worked a level for absolute silence and solemnity in deference to the importance of this gain. In letters twenty-five miles high all fluttery with lacy fringes they spelled it out, while exclamation points and made stars leaped in a purple sky to celebrate . . . . . a *monster* . . .

Yes! Next morning they found him dead, buttoned down like a lump, calmed up like an iron ball, his Calmness settings shoved completely above their highest calibrations on the heart-felt. Nothing that any one of them could say or think or wish or cry or do would revive Soal Achle now. The iron doctors of Ironland, completely baffled here, the diagnostic magic in their black bags' measurers entirely useless here, shrugged and shook their heads; and, knowing at best the dead, and poets, pay only meager fees, these pill dispensers and automated body-tinkers went away to other, more usual, pulses. While far off, high in a purple sky, the last of last night's news lingered and fluttered, ragged and barely discernible now, but still there—tattered ghost letters singed in

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—DAVID R. BUNCH

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A.	Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	67,703	68,518
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This is the first published story of R. A. Montana, who tells us he is in his mid-thirties, married, a minor executive in one of the nation's largest financial institutions, began writing on January first, 1973, and has read stf avidly since the age of nine . . .

INTERSTATE 15

R. A. MONTANA

"THE PRESSURE DROP on this side of the lock is just about what we anticipated. How's my transmission?"

"Transmission is clear. What's it look like in there?"

"Gloomy. I'm standing directly in front of the lock and looking down the tunnel. The overheads all seem to be working and I can see as far as the main excavation. I'm moving out under the overheads now and the suit is functioning beautifully. I can move almost normally even with the lack of pressure. The tunnel is fairly smooth with no obstructions that I can see so far. I've reached the diggers now. The middle digger seems to be titled somewhat. Have you got it back as far as it will go?"

"Our instruments read full back and locked. How bad is it?"

"It's on a slight angle. Can't see too clearly. There's something underneath but it's in the shadow. Wait a minute, there, I can see it. It's hung up on a small boulder but the treads are clear. Try moving it forward when I get into position. Alright, slow forward now. Easy. . .little slower. . .stop! Traverse about fifteen degrees right and back it again. Good. I think I can get between them now."

"Stand by. Control says access space is too limited. Chances of a suit tear are high. You're either going to have to go over the digger or abort."

"Over it is then. Give me full power to the middle digger and fast forward on command. I'm climbing up the back now. Stand by! Now, lower the outboard blades as far as possible. Good. Looks like I've got plenty of room. Stand by to engage. Engage—

"What was that? Are you alright?"

"Yes. That loud pop you heard was my helmet taking out one of the overheads. No problem. I'm clear of the digger so you can cut power."

"Power off."

"The goings a little rougher now. Rubble strewn all over. I'm past the last overhead and I'm turning on my suit beams. I must have lost one of my helmet beams

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when I hit the overhead but visibility is still good. I can see the end of the tunnel ahead now. The incline is getting steeper. Looks like the middle digger was malfunctioning before it hit that boulder. There's a large rut that's caused a pile up of loose debris on one side and I can't reach the end wall here. Moving to the other side now. No problem here, I've got plenty of room to plant the charge."

"How much is plenty?"

"Enough, I'm placing the charge as far up the wall as I can reach. There, in place and ready. Moving back to the digger now. I'm going to have to stay in front of the digger, can't chance that climb again. I've got as much cover as I'm going to get so you can detonate when ready."

"Detonating now. What can you see?"

"The whole call is moving outward very slowly. No change in pressure. The walls gone now. I can't see anything beyond the hole."

"Is it a large enough access?"

"Repeat, you're garbled."

"How is access? We picked up a large amount of interference when the wall blew. Going to high gain now."

"Access is sufficient, but visibility very poor. Your transmission is still breaking up. Shall I hold while you work it out?"

"Control says it's going to get worse before it gets better!"

"Thanks!"

"You're still go for phase one. Let's see what's in there."

"Roger. Standing at the opening now. Suit beams almost useless. I can see two, maybe three, body lengths and that's it. Turning on the suit sensors now. Something's wrong—sensor readings for height and distance are off the scale. Do I have a malfunction?"

"Negative. Your telemetry looking good here."

"In that case what we have here is a cavern of tremendous size! I'm getting absolutely no bounce back from the walls or ceiling and. . .hold it. . .suit temperature is rising rapidly. Turning coolers on full-suit stabilizing, but outside temperature very high. I'm picking up heavy wave bombardment on the long side of the spectrum—coming from high above—various oscilations from all directions but concentration from above is the worst. Still can't see much. . .ground uneven and steep. . .moving out now for contingency sample."

"Say again on contingency sample."

"I'm moving out for contingency sample now."

"Stand by. Control suggests you place a booster at the mouth of the hole to improve communication."

"Good idea. Backing up now—booster in place—any improvement?"

"Better. Take it slow and good

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luck."

"I've descended a slight incline and the ground composition is very soft. Fine grained and powdery and very hot. Seems to be nothing but humps and valleys. Got the sample now. Visibility getting much worse. I'm going to—hold it! I got a bounce back as I came out of a depression! It's a wall directly in front of me and quite high. It's running perpendicular to my line of travel and I can't pick up and end to it in either direction. Do you copy?"

"We're with you."

"I wish you were, It's getting lonely in here. I'm standing at the base of the wall now. It's made up of wide lengths of what appears to be a base metal of some sort. First readings showed it was solid, but there are gaps between the lengths of metal. I think I can stand on the lower length and squeeze through to the other side without too much difficulty."

"Control says you are free to use your own judgment, but please assess the risk carefully."

"Fellas, you're talking to the most careful risk assessor that ever lived! Going up now. It's going to be tight but—there—made it! The ground on this side is level and very smooth. Sensors indicate the strip is very wide, but I'm getting a reading of the same loose ground on the other side. The temperature of the strip is much higher than anything I've recorded so far. Coolers are functioning near overload so I'm going to have to get to the other side as fast as possible."

"Control wants to know how your visuals are now."

"Lousy. There's a great deal of radiant energy rising from the strip. It's completely nullifying my suit beams so I'm turning them off to divert more power to the coolers. My flow is 71 percent and I'm getting flags. Inside temp seems to be dropping a bit, next time we'll know what to expect and—

"What is it? Your transmission cut off. Can you read us?"

"Sorry, I was knocked down."

"Repeat, please."

"I was knocked off balance. Trying to regain my footing. Very heavy vibrations coming down the strip. One direction only. Everything shaking. Feels like a quake. What do you show?"

"We're getting them now. Mild vibrations at the mouth of the hole. Gaining intensity. Definitely coming from the cavern you're in. Debris starting to shift in the tunnel. Control is aborting the mission. I repeat, abort now!"

"Roger, am aborting but I can't make much progress with the ground heaving back and forth like this so you guys keep that portal open as long as you can, hear?"

"We're moving the diggers to shore up the tunnel now, but if this thing doesn't stop soon there won't be anyway for you to come back in. Move it!"

"I'm almost across the strip but

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my sensors are showing an object apparently moving down the strip. It seems to be focal point of the vibrations. I can't believe it! Very large object—radiating high intensity heat waves and moving at an impossible speed. Nothing can move that fast! Are you getting this?"

"Keep moving. There's still time."

"I just blew my coolers, boys. Can't move the suit now—I'm going to record this thing as long as I can."

"Hang on. We're moving a digger out and we'll get it to you as fast as we can. Conserve your energy. That suit will keep you alive longer than you think."

"Don't kid yourselves. Even if you managed to get the digger out you'd never get it through that metal wall in time. Save yourself the trouble I'm going to give you what readings I can on this thing now, so don't interrupt. Sensors show high density metal—mass is off the scale so that proves it can't be moving as fast as it is—but it is! It seems to be rolling on very short and narrow treads and it's five or six times the size of our biggest digger. It is definitely artificial, I repeat, artificial. It's on me now and it's taking up a good half of the strip. . .heat blinding. . .vibrations terrible. . .sensors on overload now— I can't—

"CONTROL to Portal Team. Any life sings on your board?"

"Negative. He's dead. What are your instructions on the tunnel?"

"Seal it."

—R. A. MONTANA

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SILENT CRICKETS

John Shirley, who is making his first appearance here, tells us that his stories have already appeared in Clarion III, Universe, *and several non-stf magazines. The following story deals with the transmoglification of Art . . .*

JOHN SHIRLEY

THE MILKY MOONLIGHT sifted by mercuric clouds, snickers through the dense woods in slippery shafts. The faint light laps at the crotches of trees and catches on tangles of bared branches, giving the moss the silver sheen of mold. The deciduous trees are in bunches infrequently invaded by a lone pine. Roots are choked with fallen leaves. Bared branches are abstracted into atmospheric capillaries. In the inky shadows under a short conical fir tree a man crouches with a rifle in his right hand. He moves slowly forward, trying to make as little noise as he can, and creeps into the crater left by an uprooted pine. The huge dying pine is lying on its side, smaller frustrated trees crushed under its torso; its roots are thrusting up over the man's head. He hunkers in the shallow pit, his booted feet gripping the mud, rifle barrel catching the light and tinting it blue. The only sound is the *chirr* of a sneaking racoon and the repetitive song of the crickets.

The crickets go abruptly silent.

The man is on the alert.

Something moves invisibly through the woods. He tenses, raises the .36, pops the gunstock against his right shoulder, finger tightening around the trigger. He reaches for the safety catch. *Is it one of them?*

The figure emerges.

It's a man, a man alone. The man with the gun, Buckley, curator of the Deepwood Museum of Modern Art, stands and waves. The stranger, his face only partially visible, nods and comes forward. He stands silently a few feet from Buckley, looking at the long rifle upright at the curator's side. The man wears dungarees and a white longsleeve shirt. The night conceals most of his features.

"Are you Buckley?" He asks in a low, oily tone.

"Yes."

"I'm. . .Cranshaw. I'm from the New York Art Association. I've been looking for you. I believe your story. . .more or less. I want to hear it from your own lips, anyway. I've had a similar. . .experience. I came to talk to you in your study and your

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servant—she was quite flustered—said that you'd run out here after burning the paintings. A strange business, Buckley, burning fifty thousand dollars worth of Miro and Matta and Picasso. . ."

"How many kinds of sexual reproduction are there?" Buckley asks, his voice sounding strange to him in the sucking darkness.

"Well. . .there's mitosis, and cross-pollination and among humanity there's good old—"

"Among humanity there's something *else*," Buckley interrupts, speaking in a rapid clip. "A new kind of mutation. Have you heard it said that an artist doesn't create a 'new' vision, but only siphons it from another dimension of reality where that abstraction is the physical law? Perhaps. Perhaps if the abstract or surrealist artist steals from that world's images, from that other plane long enough, the creatures inherent to that world will take an interest in us and contrive to come here. Perhaps they'll use us as a medium, transferring themselves through a kind of paintbrush insemination. I keep thinking of the words of the dadaist Jean Arp: *Art is like fruit, growing out of man. . .like the child out of its mother.* . . .Someday, Cranshaw, a child will replace its parents."

"Maybe. Come back with me to your study and we'll talk about it—"

"No. Haven't you been reading about all the artists who have been disappearing?" Well, I was visiting Matta when I *saw* something happen to him. I can't describe—"

"All this is interesting but rather xenophobic," the stranger interrupts. "My experiences were not so much like yours as I had thought. But it's not easy to be a curator these days, God knows. Those snotty young painters. But come back and have a drink with me, Buckley. We'll work things out from there. Don't be afraid." He reaches out a hand to Buckley's shoulder.

Buckley steps backwards, his hand tightens on the barrel of the gun. If this man is from the Art Association, why is he dressed like a country hick? Cranshaw touches Buckley's shoulder. Suspicions confirmed. Buckley feels it then, the warning tingle, the onrush of activated abstraction. He steps back again, raises the gun. "You lied to me," he murmurs as much to the night as to 'Cranshaw'.

Another movement from the far side of the fallen tree catches his eye. Pure moving anachronism issuing from the aureola of upturned roots. It was the abstract figure of Marcel Du Champ's *Nude Descending A Staircase* given its own independent life. A study of strobed motion, the exegesis of a few moments of time into cubism. The creature, viewed literally, glowing against the tenebrous curtain of the woods, resembles a robot strung in

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Siamese twin extrapolations of itself, leaving behind a hallucinogenic acid trail like a mechanical cape. It might be built of copper-coloured tin cans and its torso (futurist extrapolation of pivotal rotation) is built in striations like the gills of a shark. Moving toward Buckley, it is a random tumble of spastic geometry, a carnivorous handy kitchen appliance. The figure is a vector for the bizarre, leaving behind it a wake of abstracted trees, brush distorting into a vision of Siamese triplet belly dancers; treetrunks made Rousseau primitive and perfectly cylindrical-smooth, branches becoming pincushion spines. But the voice of the vector is human.

"I couldn't wait any longer. I had to come. Has he been readied?"

"No," the stranger who called himself Cranshaw replies, "Not just yet."

"Buckley," came the voice from the golden arachnid whirlpool, "come here."

Buckley pulls a slim penlight from his pocket and shines it on Cranshaw's face. He gasps. A Modigliani simplification, that face, with pits of Munch hollowness around the eyes. The man, while outwardly proportional, is made of rigid planes, unmoving eyes, the same perpetual sardonic smile two inches to the left of his nose. One of his eyes is considerably higher than the other. His arms are blocked into rectangular surfaces with ninety-degree corners.

"It's alright," says the Cranshaw-thing, its voice fuzzy now. "Don't worry." It reaches out a squared-off hand to Buckley's upraised rifle, touches the barrel with a gentle caress at the same moment that the curator touches the trigger.

The gun doesn't go off. There is a conspicuous silence. Instead of an explosion, finally comes a faint puffing sound. A globular bullet bounces like a soap bubble off Cranshaw's chest and floats up through the clawing trees. Desperately, Buckley feels the barrel of the gun. It sags in his fingers like an exhausted erection, rubbery and pliant. He breaks off a piece of the barrel and puts it to his mouth. Licorice. The gun melts into a snakelike abstraction. He flings it away but already the tingling chill is travelling up his arm. He looks at the two abstract beings standing patiently by, sees them reticulate and waver like an unstable tv picture. He looks down at his body, sees his legs sprout roots which rapidly burrow into the humus under his new hooves.

—JOHN SHIRLEY

A MUST FOR ALL CONAN READERS

THREE BIG CONAN ISSUES, THE WITCH OF THE MISTS, BLACK SPINX OF NEBTHU, AND RED MOON OF ZEMBABWIE by L SPRAGUE DE CAMP & LIN CARTER. In THREE ISSUES OF FANTASTIC. (THREE for $2.00—75¢ each)

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fantasy books

reviewed by Fritz Leiber

WILD CARD, by Raymond Hawkey and Roger Bingham; Stein and Day, 1974, $7.95, 248 pp.

The publishers of this vivid and grisly suspense novel (this "high-level chiller," as Herb Caen calls it) saw fit to release its premise as news, so I'll start by quoting them:

"A president like Nixon and a Secretary of State like Kissinger could plot to unify all of the divisive elements in the US by staging a fake attack from outer space.

"They could round up all of the best scientific brains in the world; provide them with the finest labs; and set them to work creating a rocket ship, complete with human-like cerebroids at the controls and a defense mechanism built into the ship which will release a deadly gas on impact.

"Then, in a stroke of mad genius, they could plant this ship in a home in Los Angeles so that it looks like it crashed. Result: 10,000 Angelenos killed by a deadly gas from a ship they believe came from another planet."

The book was written by a method which we may well see employed more often on science fiction set in the near future. Two intelligent, pleasant and well-educated young men of good connections and adequate literary ability (British in this case) work up a plot. They kick around the science elements with the appropriate experts. As the writing proceeds they invite the criticisms and suggestions of suitable competent authors (here including Len Deighton of *Funeral in Berlin*, etc., clearly highly knowledgeable in the area of government intrigue).

Judging from the results, the scientists really cooperated. (Might have been more difficult in America.) There's a lot of clever stuff on faking alien life forms and technology: cloned brain tissues low in Carbon 14 to suggest millennia spent in space, a different mathematical system, novel alloys, *no* robots (today they would suggest Earth), the wild card of the title from games theory, and even secret messages transmitted

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by "memory molecules" hypothesized from McConnell's flatworms, though how they would be recorded on isn't completely speculated out; nor is the precise mating of the actual explosion with the faked explosion-results.

Most of the book, however, is set in strongly visualized scenes with episodes of scientific demonstration and colorfully violent action that could film very effectively—Universal has an option. When the authors characterize by action and speech they don't do badly, but when they writer-describe (fortunately not often) they use the stereotypes of a B-film scenario. Some of the conversations of the scientists seem overly simple, but that's a lot better than having them obscure.

The book doesn't skate around vital scenes and procedures, as most stories of high government intrigue do. And its lurid theme fits all too well into our world of Watergate, search-and-destroy missions, and zoological and botanical warfare.

Mostly, I think, I hopefully look forward to seeing, in a *well*-realized movie, the president watching one of his guards having his lower jaw blown off in a gun-battle at Dulles International Airport between mobile departure lounges (a gun-battle with a fire-power reminiscent of the SLA shoot- and burn-out at Watts); the break-up of a Boeing 737 in excruciating fast-and-slow motion; the president's chief science advisor (the best character in the book, a really nasty job! George C. Scott?) putting together the bomb that will bring the story to a neater end than even *he* suspects.

THE FEMALE MAN, by Joanna Russ, Bantam Books. (I read this novel in *ms.* immediately after it was scheduled for publication.)

You don't know anything about the *real* war between women and men until you've read Ms. Russ' *The Female Man.* It is an exciting science-fiction adventure story and (without the least preaching) a shivery ultimatum from Women's Lib. It is the most sensational and, paradoxically, the truest novel about the war of the sexes since Philip Wylie's *The Disappearance* or (in another ambiance) Robert Graves' *Hercules, My Shipmate.* But it is more than that: it is the first novel of such a war as it might very well be fought in earnest between women and heterosexual men. What other writer has taken up the problem of how children would be procured and reared, or day-to-day sexual gratification provided for, in such a total conflict as it went on decade after decade?

Ms. Russ imbeds this war in an equally original fictional speculation about the nature of time travel in a universes-sheaf where the fifth dimension Change has

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been added to the fourth dimension Time, and all possible universes commingle. So it shouldn't come as a surprise (but it does!) that Ms. Russ is herself one of her four principal characters, even meeting with the other three for lunch at Schraft's (Oh, the cunning innocence of it, Watson!) to devise evil against the World of Men.

The three are Janet, bluff and outdoorsy superwoman, who gets along very well on a monosexual future earth and who really doesn't enjoy killing men; Jeannine, victime of machismo and dupe of the feminine mystique, yet who poisons men emotionally and is ripe for tutoring on the Gentle Art of Manslaughter. In particular, the portrait of Alice Jael Reasoner (Jeannine's tutor) is unforgettable, the genocidal, ss-type, Garbo-esque lady assassin who gets her greatest private joys and professional satisfactions from killing men, yet who keeps a beautiful, lobotomized, computer-controlled male around her home as a sexual plaything. Contrary to Ms. Russ' admonition to her book, it does "reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses." (Male noses in particular.) And I'm glad. (Quick, Watson—the needle!)

IMAGINARY WORLDS, by Lin Carter, Ballantine Books, 1973, $1.25, 278 pp.

It's utterly amazing how long it can take some clearly-needed piece of writing to get done or even begun: in this case a book of literary history and criticism about a special sort of fiction that was being widely written 50 years ago and more: eerie adventures set in "olden times" and strange far lands. We've even named it: heroic fantasy, or sword and sorcery, or just plain romance. In England it has appeared mostly in books—by writers such as Lord Dunsany, T. H. White, and Tolkien. In America there have been books too (James Branch Cabell's, say) but much of it has first seen light in pulp magazines and paperbacks—stories by Clark Ashton Smith, A. Merritt, Robert E. Howard, C. L. Moore, Andre Norton. Some of it has turned up in putative juveniles: *The Hobbit*, C. S. Lewis' Narnia books, *The Three Mulla Mulgars* by Walter de la Mare.

Some of the stuff has been pretty highfalutin': Cabell's *Jurgen* and Tolkien's *Ring* books. But other of it has been so widely popular and clearly written to entertain that public libraries have tried to disown it: the Oz books and Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars books.

Some authors of the stuff become so highly regarded that cults grow up around them: Tolkien and Cabell and Burroughs again, Smith, Howard, Lovecraft (only marginally involved through his *Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*

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and Dunsanian short stories, but too good to miss). Endless little articles and big bibliographies get published obscurely—uncritical adulation, ferocious put-downs, hair-splitting discussions of minutiae, the hugging of a wondrous special taste, sacred almost to the point of secrecy.

The stuff is there, all right. The field is there. *But nobody writes about it all at once,* simply setting it all in chronological and other order, comparing the writers with each other, evaluating them, pointing out influences. A book about E. R. Eddison *and* E. R. Burroughs? Poictesme *and* Oz? Tolkien *and* Howard? Unthinkable!

And then somebody really does the job and gets it published and—Hye, presto!—the whole scene has changed. At last other critics have something to add to or disagree with. It doesn't have to be more than a reasonably adequate job and cover most of the territory, though this book is and does. It can't be the *last* word, if only because it's the *first.* People wonder how they ever got along without it. In this case we've Lin Carter to thank.

Sam Moscowitz did the same thing for science fiction with his many short biographies of recent and living writers. L. Sprague de Camp did it in a small way for Clark Ashton Smith in his remarkably informative and level-headed article "Sierran Shaman," published in this magazine, October 1972. And he (of all people!) apparently will be the first to publish a full-scale biography of H. P. Lovecraft (Doubleday, early 1975).

All honor to them!

Getting down to specifics about Lin Carter's *Imaginary Worlds,* he devotes the first eight chapters to the history of modern heroic fantasy. First the early hard-cover authors, mostly British: William Morris (probably the best spot to make a start, though his books are dull), Dunsany, Cabell, and Eddison (Carter considers *The Worm Ourobouros* the greatest novel in the genre and I happen to agree—to some extent a matter of taste.)

Next come the American pulps, especially *All-Story* and *Weird Tales,* and with them Burroughs and Merritt, Smith and Howard; the brief but strong influence of *Unknown,* where Campbell, de Camp, and Pratt brilliantly used the powerful, but not all-powerful thesis that in a fictional world where magic works, ordinary physical laws would not work, at least with any regularity.

Then, dipping back to England, we have the lone wolf William Hope Hodgson with his potent *The Night Land* and the brilliant circle headed by Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. And finally the writers who are still with us.

The last three chapters of the book are an introduction to the art of heroic fantasy. First, the use of the sciences in creating

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plausible imaginary worlds —geology, geography, anthropology, etc. Second, the inventing of strange romantic names that do not jar the mind or ear: Bethmoora, Ulthar, Poltarnees, Khymyrium, and Maal Dweb, say, as opposed to Afgorkon, Zang, Nestoriamus, Zampf and Sag. Third (in brief survey) the wealth of literary tricks used to make the fantastic plausible.

Lastly, there are four large appendices: extensive chapter notes, a bibliography of Carter's basic research sources on the major writers, a list of the books (approaching 100) in the Ballantine Adult Fantasy Series, for which Carter is chief consultant, *and* an index.

The book has a charming cover by Gervasio Gallardo.

Carter writes in a free and easy, bumptious way, discussing his own fiction, written and unwritten, casually scoring points against Tolkien as well as for, thumbnail-sketching plots and doing other breezy things calculated to make more portentous critics register shock. Myself, I like it.

SHOWCASE OF FANTASY ART, ed. by Emil Petaja, Sisu Publishers, 1974, $10, 172 pages (P. O. Box 14126, San Francisco, CA, 94114)

Speaking of early American pulps featuring fantasy—*Weird Tales, All-Story, Argosy, Blue Book, Strange Tales, Amazing*—here is a generous sampling of their covers and inside art, well reproduced without reduction in size. Plus a selection of professional and amateur fantasy art down to the present. And with an unpretentious, highly informative, frankly sentimental account of it all by Petaja: "They Pictured the Wonders." As he writes, "All the vast areas of classical fantasy art from Bosch to Durer to Dali to Escher are omitted. Our attention here is toward humbler geniuses. . ." Such as Hugh Rankin, Paul, Virgil Finlay, Jack Gaughan, Hannes Bok (Petaja heads the Bokanalia Memorial Foundation), *Weird Tales* uniques like C. C. Senf and M. Brundage, "mistress of the sleek (i.e. nippleless—F. L.) nude," highly talented relative newcomers such as Tim Kirk, George Barr, and Alicia Austin and a number of weird amateurs from Clark Ashton Smith himself to a gal whose art irresistibly reminds me of the funereal crayons done by Huck Finn's Emmeline Grangerford when she was fifteen: "They was different from any pictures I ever seen before—blacker, mostly, than is common. One was of a young woman in a long white gown, standing on the rail of a bridge all ready to jump off, with her hair all down her back, and looking up to the moon." (Before all, Petaja is a kindly man.)

I unreservedly agree with him on the top place among *Weird Tales* artists he gives to Hugh

(cont. on page 128)

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)
Magazine of Fantasy in 1949, but became *Fantasy & Science Fiction* with its second issue. That magazine published some of the finest examples of surreal fantasy art by George Salter on its covers in its early days, but sales improved markedly when a switch was made to Bonestell's astronomical paintings—the quintessence of science fiction. Many of us found a lesson there.

FANTASTIC has been in continuous publication since 1952, but it survived lean times as a magazine which published action-adventure space-opera, and offered science fiction throughout most of its existence in an effort to retain a broader readership.

But times are changing. The era of the fantasy hero is with us. Today heroic fantasy need not exist in the shadow of science fiction; the audience exists today for a full-fledged *fantasy* magazine. And that's what FANTASTIC is and will continue to be: unapologetically devoted to fantasy.

This issue is perhaps one of the best-rounded in terms of fantasy that I have yet put together. Fritz Leiber takes us on another unusual jaunt with his fantasy heroes, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser (themselves major figures in heroic fantasy over the past three decades). Ross Rocklynne gives us a very different kind of fantasy —one in which a man is doomed to repeat a day in his life over and over again until he finds the way out of the trap—the sort of story that would not have been out of place either in *Unknown* or this magazine's forerunner, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Frank Belknap Long tells a story of psychological horror become real. Jack Dann takes us into a surreal world which may be in the future, but owes far more to the fantasy genre than it does to sf in its dream-like progression. Among the shorter stories, both Bunch and Malzberg have been long-fameds for their vignettes of fantasy in which each examines aspects of the human condition, while John Shirley (a newcomer to our pages) tells a story of a surreal invasion that is (surely) fantasy. And that leaves us with the redoubtable Ms. Ova Hamlet, whose parodies have found a niche of their own in this magazine.

This issue is also a balance of short stories and novelettes; like the last issue it lacks a serial. I'd very much like to hear from all of you about this kind of story balance—and whether you prefer it to our more usual balance of serial and shorts.

BOOKS: I promised when it first came out to review Ursula K. Le Guin's final novel of her Earthsea trilogy, *The Farthest Shore*, but I did not. One reason was the return to full-time reviewing here of Fritz Leiber. Another was that, after my disappointment with the second novel, *The Tombs of Atuan*, I found myself time and time again postponing reading *The Farthest Shore*. My loss.

In fact, I picked up the book on at least three separate occasions and found myself leaving it, midway through its first chapter, not to return again until the laspsed time required that I start again at the beginning. This was hardly a service to the book, but it does reflect, I fear, an aspect of Ms. Le Guin's maturing style as a writer: her absolute avoidance of melodrama.

As in *The Dispossessed* (her recent sf novel), Le Guin is writing in an uncompromised style which makes no concessions to those among us who grew up with pulp fiction. She tends

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to understatement both in her prose and her plotting. Although the themes she deals with in the Earthsea books are the very stuff of melodrama—magic, control over death—she refuses to allow them this easy form of expression, preferring instead to pursue the higher, but rockier road of careful exposition, firmly developed characterization, and making the reader part of her story by forced implication.

It does not make for fast, easy reading, but once into the book I found it impossible to put down. Yet, I finished *The Farthest Shore* with a sense of vague dissatisfaction.

There are two reasons for this, I think. One is that too much of the book focusses upon a rather uninteresting character; Arren of Enlad, through whose eyes we witness the occasionally offstage doings of the "hero of the series, Ged the Archmage. Perhaps this is because of the nominally "juvenile" categorization of the series. The first book, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, worked brilliantly because Le Guin showed us a boy growing into manhood whose growth encompassed basically powerful themes such as his ability to confront his own death. The second novel, *Tombs*, took place on a far more limited time scale, followed the viewpoint of a young female whose maturation was never fully explored (Ged played *deus ex machina* there), and was very limited in locale. In *Shore* the boy, Prince Arren, follows in the shadow of Ged, his own maturation essentially less interesting since the basic problem of the book is not of his own making, nor of his (alone) resolution.

The second reason for my dissatisfaction is the final confrontation in the book, in which Ged and Arren "descend" into the land of the dead. Up until this point a great deal of the menace implicit and explicit in the book had existed by implication: now it is made literal. Like the ending of the first book, its very literalness robs it of the impact one has become prepared for. But while in *Wizard* this final literality makes clear what the author has known all along but we (presumably) did not, in *Shore* it simply banalizes something essentially unknowable to any of us: what exists on the other side of death.

It comes down, I fear, to a failure of imagination on Le Guin's part. My own conception of death is metaphorical and metaphysical and I was prepared for something from Le Guin that would be in some respect *inspired* when she took us (and her living protagonists) beyond that vale. Instead she gave us a literal landscape, and unconvincing confrontation and a solution to the problem of return to Life which I found simplistic and contradictory to the premises set forth in the story.

Despite these complaints on my part, I believe the *Earthsea* trilogy to be a landmark in modern fantasy: wholly original in creation and scope and ambitious in both its aims and achievements. Indeed, the only real failure of the series lies perhaps in the fact that it was *too* ambitious for complete realization.

In recent months I've been reading the works of another author whom I would like to call to your attention: Lolah Burford.

In many respects Ms. Burford is much like Ms. Le Guin (I wonder if they are aware of each other? They should be): both are respected members of academic families; both write uncompromised prose; both are important novelists working outside

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commonly accepted territory.

Burford writes historical novels, one of which is unabashed fantasy and the other two of which will be of interest to fantasy fans as well. I first encountered her with *Vice Avenged, a Moral Tale,* her first novel. It was a thin book, but its dedication to Georgette Heyer convinced me I should try it. (The late Ms. Heyer wrote a number of historical romances and comedies of manners which entirely transcended the genre of which they ostensibly were a part; she concentrated largely on Regency Period England with total fidelity to the era's manners and customs; among fantasy fans there is a large sub-fandom devoted to her works which includes among its social events a "Heyer Tea" at each World SF Convention. Her works were in part inspirational of Alexei Panshin's Villiers series of a few years back.)

I enjoyed *Vice Avenged.* It had an unusual premise: to follow the almost tragic consequences of a bet among titled rakes, one of whom undertakes to carry out a rape. The story is told with wit and compassion and a remarkable understanding of both human character and the ways in which mores have changed over the years.

Both her second and third novels were published in 1974 by Bantam Books (from hardcover publication by Macmillan). The second, *The Vision of Stephen,* is a fantasy and probably no longer than her first (it feels like a 45,000-word novella, but I haven't tried to do a word-count). The story begins in the Seventh Century, but Stephen, a prince of an Anglo-Saxon king, is tortured by his father (for what the man imagines to be a traitorous act) and escapes into the early 19th Century where he is at first visible only to two young children but gains substantiality. In her foreword, Burford asks, "As for the magic in this story, a reader of our century may ask, is there any justification for it? Perhaps. The Seventh Century was a time of a pagan magic in the less civilized parts of the country, and of Christian miracles in the Church, and of occasional direct and material answers to prayer. It was an age in which mind and prayer frequently prevailed over matter." And thus the "time-traveling" is presented not as rationally justified sf, but as a case of "mind and prayer" prevailing over "matter." It is a story full of the implications of violence (that was a violent time to our way of looking at it), but yet remarkably gentle and romantic (in the older sense of the term.)

The implications of violence are much more fully explored in her third novel, *Edward, Edward.* This is an enormous work (nearly 700 pages of small type in the paperback version) and it explores at leisure that which is only lightly sketched over in the previous books. It is, in fact, the works of at least three separate novels, the first of which has its roots in her first book (to which *Edward, Edward* is an indirect sequel).

The basic premise is this: can an innocent (and highly intelligent) young boy, orphaned at the age of six, survive an utterly brutalizing upbringing at the hands of a man whom, it ultimately developes, is his real father? The man is a duke, a notorious man whose rape of the boy's mother (grown out of the same bet which launched *Vice Avenged,* but with different consequences) has resulted in his conception. Subsequently the boy (Edward, of the title) finds his torturous way to manhood,

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surviving torture, humiliation and surprisingly, love from the duke. But his spirit is bent and shaped, both knowingly and unknowingly, by the duke and only the novel's final resolution seems forced and hasty—when a last (apparently) Edward throws off his psychological shackles and opts for life on his own terms.

The book follows Edward's growth from early youth to manhood at close focus, covering the years 1795 to 1816 in three major parts. As with Burford's earlier novels, the details are carefully and closely researched; this is not one of your hasty "costume-epics", much beloved by Hollywood and publishers of trashy romance fiction. More important, she has chosen to deal with an ongoing series of emotionally powerful themes and to do so with the same care and precision of detail. (At one point Edward, teenaged, is forced to spend days in an unlit, windowless room with no food. The description of what he undergoes and how he copes with it rings true to the smallest detail: like Le Guin, Burford eschews melodrama and creates a sense of complete reality in the events she describes and the reactions of her characters to these events.) Her basic theme is explosively powerful; she embroiders it with the twin themes of incest and homosexuality. Yet none of the characters who people the book are monsters—least of all the duke. Burford sees them as human beings, shaped (or misshaped) by the reality of their time; she views each with compassion and understanding. Even when it seems certain she must be heading for a cliche, a stereotype, she proves the opposite to be true: that the stereotype is only as external viewpoint of a complex human being. As with melodrama, she brushes cliches aside as irrelevant to her novel.

As I said, I found the final pages of the book less convincing than those which went before, but one acquaintance who has also read the book suggested I was simply disappointed that it had finally ended. Perhaps so. But surely a book which has taken many hundreds of pages to explore each facet of Edward's growth toward manhood, each step and misstep along the way, could have spent a more satisfying amount of space upon its conclusion. I fear that Ms. Burford painted herself into a corner, having heaped yet greater pain and misery upon poor Edward's head in the penultimate section than either he or she could find a satisfying resolution for. But don't let that dissuade you: the back cover quotes a reviewer from the Los Angeles *Times* with "One of the best novels of the year," and with that judgment I must concur.

There is, of course, no fantasy in the conventional sense in *Edward, Edward*. But if you need fantasy to introduce you to this author, try *The Vision of Stephen* first. Its flavor is curiously like that of Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy (I wonder if it was originally intended for the "juvenile" or "young adult" market?), and both authors write in beautifully crafted, cliche-free prose with sufficient similarity of style that it seemed natural to mention them here together.

—TED WHITE

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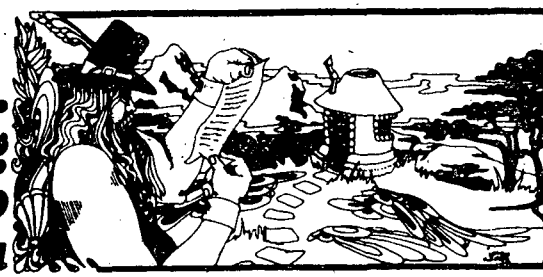
...According to You



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to *According To You*, Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046

For some inexplicable reason, mail response to the most recent (November, 1974) issue on sale as this column is being prepared has been very slight. Consequently, I'm using this opportunity to catch up on a few older letters squeezed out of earlier columns, and I hope things will be back to normal by next issue.—TW

Dear Ted:

I've not been reading FANTASTIC/AMAZING regularly for long, and I've begun to notice something unusual about how I approach your zine. With *F&SF*, I head for Gahan Wilson's cartoon first. With *Analog*, I read the cover story immediately. With your two publications, I find myself drawn inexorably to the editorials and the lettercolumns.

I conclude from this that I am drawn by the "artists" which, exemplify the true persona of a magazine, and I'll be damned if *you* aren't the drawing card in FANTISTIC and AMAZING as far as I'm concerned.

I have bones to pick with you about editorial policy, sure; I hate Sword-and-Sorcery (except for Fritz Leiber's) with a passion, and most of the stories in your zine leave me cold. Still and all, though, I figure I've gotten my six bits' worth from your editorial and from the dialogs I find in the letter-columns. If nothing else shines from the pages of your magazines, you alone support the whole damn thing.

Which leads me to the logical suggestion: why the hell don't you just chuck the whole Publisher-battling slush-pile-blearing bit and kick off a personal zine like Geis' *The Alien Critic*? If you can get me, the original Tight Fist of Sicily, to spring hard coin for your ramblings on two or three pages, think how successful you'd be putting out sixty-odd pages of it.

Consider, sir; a whole new era may be opening up for the both of us.

RICHARD BARTUCCI
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Kansas City, MO 64124

You flatter me, and it's a beguiling notion, but I have enough trouble finding topics for the few pages I write each month as it is; the notion of "sixty-odd" pages staggers me. I have now completed six years as editor of these two magazines. That's 72 editorials, and countless replies to letters, the latter much easier to do,

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since they (like this one) are simply replies which rely for their inspiration upon letters from people like you. But that's what this part of the magazine is about: a dialogue between us, and between you readers as well; a forum. —TW

Dear Ted:

Due to the idiosyncrasies of distribution law which state that Manhattan must get publications two weeks ahead of the rest of the Apple, I just finished the Brooklyn-bought July FANTASTIC and wrote the first page of a letter about it when I copped the September issue in Manhattan. So this letter will speak of both; bear with me.

First: Conan. I think that the Roy Thomas-Marvel contribution to the Conan saga was the return of Howardian readability. The Carter-de Camp stuff lacks the wit, intensity, and ingenuity of the authors' separate ventures on characters of their own (i.e., de Camp's *The Fallible Fiend,* Carter's Thonger work). Instead, on my third attempt (at last successful) to get through the not-short-enough novel, I paraphrased Conan and thought, "Crom, but it felt good to be through this shit!" And the cover and interior art by Ron Miller left much (in fact, everything) to be desired; they were far inferior, in my eyes, to Graham's outing, which you so despise. Billy is a fine layout man; his inks are weak, though, I will admit, and his work would be ace if inked by another artist. (Check out, for example, Bill's work on Marvel's *Black Panther* strip, in tandem with Klaus Janson.) Anyway, badmouthing a past employee is beneath you.

Geston's "The Stronghold" was fine, but uninspired; I've never read the man's work before, and I hope he will deliver on his promise.

"Track Two" was, well, Malzbergian; Barry has crawled into my head and twiddled my terminals again, as well as adding to the mind-maggot population.

The Bunch was harmless, but to my mind, pointless. And the books column (artistry of Smith) was a refreshing change of pace.

I'm holding back on Snead's "Kozmic Kid", for reasons of discipline. It really hit my psyche between my eyes, and stayed there, (magic-) mushrooming. The kid (not "the Kid", but the kid: Snead) has a way with a phrase that makes me want to forget about writing and become an accountant. . .I feel outclassed before I start. *This is a first sale*?!?!

There were, of course, a few flaws and facets I was not too pleased with, of course: a poorly-handled sex scene (the gay come-on, put-down worked better), and the disgustingly in-joking strong resemblance between George and Kesey/Owsley cross, to name two. But anyone who has the balls to try to set his pace with Dylan quotes—and to make it work—deserves my near-looking the other way. *First Sale*?!?!? *Gawwwwd* !!!!!!!!

On to September. A superb Jones cover surrounded an uneven issue. As is my habit, I will hold off reading the novel until it is complete; but I will say that Swann, a fine stylist, is always welcome.

The Effinger was nifty (and I mean that as the simplest, purest praise) story. It was straightforward, lovely, and strong. Thanks, Piglet. And the Malzberg, frighteningly Malzbergian (a word taught me by my friend, Crazy Michael; its meaning, I think, is obvious to you), was the quintessence of

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depression.

The Thongor piece was welcome, especially to reaffirm my faith in Carter, after last issue's Conan travesty. Straightforward, perceptive, it was all that Carter and de Camp could not produce two months ago. And, thanks to J. Mike Nally, it was brilliantly illustrated.

Eklund struck again, with the double-edged sword which is, to me, his trademark; this time the twin edges were poignancy and truth. They were both honed fine, and they both glittered.

But now, the downhill side: the Tom Monteleone piece was, well, a piece—a turd. I think we all wrote that old rotten character-picks-up-his-own-story chestnut, with different window-dressing, in high school. Only Mr. Monteleone has the chutzpah (that's sorta like Jewish balls) to try to sell it, and you, Ted, the momentary dumbs to buy it. I'm surprised and disappointed.

Since disappointment is the tone, I might as well continue. Unlike previous installments de Camp's Morris profile was boring and dull; it did not hold my interest for a minute. Perhaps it was the subject; but almost certainly the writing was below par.

But Ted, thus far we have spoken (I have spoken; editorial habit strikes again!) of questions of subjective qulaity. The points I wish to discuss hereafter do not relate to stories, nor are they simple opinions.

1) I am sick, *sick*, SICK!!! of Star Trek discussion. Let it be said, then, that *Star Trek* was occasionally SF, occasionally not, sometimes good TV, sometimes not. . .but usually, most often, in the vast fields of gray in the middle. One insight, though, on its popularity: we were sitting at my aunt's and uncle's house, my parents and I and my niece (in order of age, descending of course), with *Star Trek* on the dumdum box, the Harry-Mudd-world-of-androids episode, when my father remarked: "I don't see how anyone can sit and watch and listen to this junk. Nothing is average." Perhaps its good is in its alienation; as with rock to an extent, "the men don't know but the little girls all understand."

2) Apologies are in order. First I feel that you, Ted, owe Billy Graham one, as I said before, for your kick in his balls.

But more importantly, I'd appreciate an apology from Fritz Leiber, for myself—and others like me. I find it astonishing that in the same column in which Fritz proposes his non-sexist terms ("eh" indeed!), he makes a sexist (or if you prefer, "sexualist") generalization: "Avoid camp like poison. This form of humor, a favorite of the gay community. . ." Ted, I'm gay, and don't particularly dig camp; most of my gay friends don't either, at least not any more than their average straight (what a messy term) counterpart. My own humor tends toward the intelligent insanity of Firesign, if to anything specific. Gays no more have "favorite" forms of humor than of literary or other tastes; sometimes I think the only thing we have in common is sex. (And even then. . .) But cut us, and we bleed; arouse us, we fuck. We are people.

If you remember, Ted or Fritz, Lenny Bruce's old routine about sexual generalizations, I might add: ". . .and Filipinos come fast. And spades have wangs like a baby's fist with an apple in it." Demoralizing, depersonalizing, demeaning stereotypes, dragging us down to caricatures, are filthy pool, Fritz. Please

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explain or apologize.

Ted, I will part by saying that I have been harsh, but we tend to be the harshest with those we love, and AMAZING and FANTASTIC (and therefore, you) are such things. You got me into sf magazines, deepened my interest in sf, and brought me through many a tear-stained night. I will stand at your theoretical back, patting it or shrieking over your shoulder, as my conscience dictates. But. . .(I hope this does not look bad in print; you have never met me, after all, nor I you). . .I love you, brother. .

ROGER KLORESE
2739 East 65th Street
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11234

I think if you reread my comment on Billy Graham's Conan illo you'll find I neither "badmouth"ed him nor gave him a "kick in his balls." Nor do I "despise" him. I've met Billy and I've liked his work ever since I first saw his cartooning in Screw *and his early contributions to the Warren magazines,* Creepy *and* Eerie*; I'm fully prepared to admit that his Marvel work has on occasion been impressive. But that hardly excuses the gross caricature he turned in to illustrate the Conan story (I vastly preferred the Miller work on the subsequent Conan) nor the fact that his work for us had been in general inferior to his other work. At present we have more artists clamoring to work for us than I can fit into a single issue—and most of them are giving us superior work. I see no reason to settle for less. Moving on to other topics: You missed the point of the Monteleone story. It was a basic lesson in what* not *to write (and how not to write it) which Tom wrote after reading our slush pile for a while (only the authors' names and specific prose had been changed to protect the guilty); it did not exist solely in order to justify the ending. As for* Star Trek*, I agree–but no doubt this very mention will set off a new wave of letters from its ardent defenders. I'll leave your comments to Fritz Leiber for him to deal with as he sees fit, but I think you'll have to admit that there has been a gay culture which spawned "camp;" I suspect that Gay Lib has changed things quite a bit in the last few years, but that culture, while perhaps no longer representative of a majority of gays, does still exist. And, finally, I cut your plug for your fanzine as too dated but will mention here that your working title was* Lifezine *("main areas of concentration will be sf/comix/other literature/film/music (rocks&)/theater'/sex/etc. . .life") and that you're asking a dollar a copy. Okay?*
—TW

Dear Ted,

The November FANTASTIC sits by my left hand. I have not finished reading all of it as yet (a two month old baby is occupying a lot of our time recently) but I felt that I must comment on the issue.

The cover was delightful, similar to *Galaxy/If* vintage Vaughn Bodé but uniquely Joe Staton. While many of Bodé's covers portray pose a question of "What is the purpose of this?" (i.e., giant spaceships floating over the countryside, gargantuan periscopes rising from the sea and looking *down* on a battleship, strange mechanical claws of tremendous size picking up lumber in the middle of a virgin forest, etc.), Staton's seems to ask "What is the meaning of this?" Bodé's machines are obviously doing something, the question is to what goal, and that

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makes his covers exercises in imagination. Staton's dragon/spaceship juxaposition is a symbol, a Rorshach test for the viewer. Dragons have no purpose, only meanings.

Have you seen the advertisements for J.O. Jeppson's *The Second Experiment* in recent issues of the New York *Times* book section and *Analog*? The ad shows a Gorgo-like monster clinging to a space vehicle of some sorts. It looks more like a movie poster than anything else. Odd how to artist can use virtually the same idea and how one can turn out a true work of art while another does just hack work. Let's see more covers by Station.

I haven't read part II of Thomas Burnett Swann's "Will-o-the-Wisp" but I have been kept busy (though not one quarter as busy as my wife!) with the above mentioned new born baby (girl, Yang-mi Rose Dixon, now well over 11 pounds). I have read part one and am thinking of asking everybody I meet to give me a good kick in the ass. Why? Well, four or five years ago I met the remarkable Mr. Swann. At the time he didn't impress me muich (oh, the stupidity of a high school sophomore! Hopefully I have learned to go beyond first appearances by now). As a result, I didn't read any of his novels, even though they were cropping up all over the place. Some months ago I bought a DAW book by him, *How the Mighty Have Fallen*, but never got around to reading it.

So, I read part I of "Will-o-the-Wisp" and got hooked immediately. Needless to say, I'm looking for other Swann books where ever I can find them. And I'll stop thinking a writer has to fit a certain pattern (Mr. Swann reminded me of a slightly befuddled clerk, if he'll pardon me for saying so) and start looking for his talent where it matters, namely his writings.

Dave Horowitz's "What's a Mother For?" was a nice, tight little story, similar in style to to many of the more *outre* stories in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and similar in content with many *Night Gallery* episodes. I got the point of the story quickly enough, but I wonder if many people missed it on the first reading (I had to re-read the last few paragraphs to make sure my first impression was correct).

Next, the nitty of the gritty, "Saying Grace" by Terry Carr and Lawrence M. Janifer. No doubt you will get a lot of long winded, badly misspelled letters in the tone of "May God cast thy sinful soul in Hell for eternal damnation because you printed sacrilege!"

Now, I don't want to come on like that, but I would like to point out a few faults with the basic premise of the story (no, I don't think Terry and Lawrence are doomed because they wrote that story). First of all, somewhere in the book of Romans, Paul says something to the effect of "It is by faith that you are saved and not by good works, least any man should boast." In other words, *faith* in God and Christ (meaning belief in their forgiveness of all sins, among other things) is what saves us, not our good deeds (nor do our bad deeds doom us. A true Christian knows that even if he or she slips up and sins, God eternally loves and forgives them. To be unrepentant means one doesn't feel the need for forgiveness because oen doesn't believe in morality and/or one thinks one's sins are unforgiveable, i.e., no faith and trust in God). Ergo Mitchell could never have sold his soul at all, since no one enters the

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Kingdom of God by his Earthly works.

Second, Mitchell's fear of backsliding is entirely groundless because somewhere in the New Testament it is said that no one is tempted beyond his ability to endure. Prayer would most definitly help, since the Bible is most certainly clear when it says all things are possible through Jesus Christ.

No dount you will be getting dozens of letters with *beau-coup* different theories and beliefs. I hope I didn't sound too evangelistic (if anything I wrote helps somebody I'm glad but that wasn't my intention). On the whole I enjoyed the story.

While writing this letter a friend of mine dropped in and saw the cover to FANTISTIC. Dave Stansbury (my friend) says that the cover shows two dragons fighting, one being mythical, the other being technological.

My wife, Soon-ok, looked at the cover and said that it represented bird and man, natural and unnatural flight. She says the bird is mythical, of course. Perhaps it would be interesting to hear what other readers interpreted the cover as.

From an earlier letter:

A few comments concerning both your and Fritz Leiber's opinions on filmed science fiction and fantasy.

I tried applying Leiber's four-part pattern to other, earlier science fiction, most notably *Metropolis, Things To Come,* and *The Omega Man.* In none of the cases did it fit without stretching. Never the less, the films can be broken into more or less four general parts: Subhumans (workers post-war barbarians/The Family), Dommed Utopia (Metropolis/pre-1970 Everytown/Neville's apartment), Psychedelic Trip (Moloch/Wings over the world/the escape from the stadium), and the Encounter with Time ("The heart must meditate between the brains and the hands."/"The Universe or nothingness"/The blood is life.)

Naturally, this leads to to think that while Leiber's theory of a four part theme is valid, it need not appear in the order indicated. Indeed, I think he has given the wrong titles to the themes, coming close, but just missing what they really are.

Call them instead Unaware, Aware, Revelation, Realization. The Unaware state is, of course, those on the outside. Call them workers, apemen, Brutuals, or whatever. Aware is when they realize that they don't know all the answers but do recognize the questions. Revelation is the appearnace of the truth, and Realization is it's application to the human condition.

As such, all five films *(Metropolis, Things to Come, 2001: A Space Odyssey, The Omega Man,* and *Zardoz)* easily fit into the pattern (needless to say, not all five films are of equal merit, I'm merely pointing out their common construction.)

His points on heroic fantasy were quite accurate, though he should have added the mention of whimsey. Humor is often needed to lighten the impact of a scene.

Case in point: *I Spy* (the TV show, not the movie) and the agents with the perpetual expense account problems. A good deal of the humor in that show was generating from the problems Kelley and Scott had handling finances and doing paperwork.

Perhaps the best example can be the eighth Bond movie, *Live and Let Die,* not for what it contains but for what it lacks. Instead of the unforced

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tidbits dropped throughout the rest of the Bond films, *Live and Let Die* wrote a punchline into every major chase and/or fight scene.

The best part of the film, the redneck sheriff quaking with rage as he fumbles with the handcuffs he wants to put on Bond ("What *are* you, boy?) Some kinda doomsday machine? . . . . .Secret agent!?!?! On whose side?") points out another hint: Occasionally take something to its logical extreme. Just occasionally, however, because it is possible to run something into the ground.

Fritz Leiber's list of films in the March issue caused a few raised eyebrows, I'm sure. I fail to see why the inclusion of *When Worlds Collide* came while *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds* (yeah, it's a "Monsters-invade-the-Earth" picture, but its the best done of its type), both of which can be counted as George Pal's best, didn't. I suppose I should be grateful that *Destnation Moon* wasn't included, though most other "best SF movie" lists include it. I was also disappointed at the omission of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *The Invisible Man.*

The Phantom of the Opera was not supernatural, neither was *Frankenstein* (the latter was pseudo-science fiction). *The Birds* were never explained one way or the other.

I always thought of *King Kong* as science fiction and not fantasy, since an island with prehistoric monsters might exist somewhere.

And as for *Star Trek*–

There were only two good *Star Trek* episodes, Ellison's *The City of the Edge of Forever* and Gerrold's *The Trouble With Tribbles.* The rest were above average but otherwise standard TV fare, with only occasional brilliance. I liked some of the early *The Invaders* shows because I have a paranoid streak in me. *UFO* offered some great ideas, occasionally, and the whole series was rather good when taken in *toto,* but, alas, the individual episodes had a tendency to fall apart.

The best were *The Avengers* and *The Prisoner,* both English fare.

As any TV movie phreaque can tell you, the first episodes of *Lost in Space* were equal to *Star Trek* from a purely visual standpoint. The show also had an excellent idea to start with, namely giving the traitorous Dr. Smith control of the robot, thereby forcing the Robinsonss to accept him.

This, of course, couldn't be, since villians are supposed to be clearly defeated and/or punished by the end of each episode. With the robot in his power, Dr. Smith was damn well invincible. Of course, he soon lost control and ended up as a mincing fairy (you mean you didn't realize Dr. Smith was a fag?). So much for that idea.

Anybody remember a show called *Men in Space?* I believe, despite Roddenberry's claim to the opposite, that it was the first SF TV show to half way realistically portray spaceflight.

By the way, I've noticed that many non-fans claim they can't understand *2001, Zardoz, or Slaughterhouse 5.* I was able to follow the plots quite easily. Am I the only one, or can all SF fans follow the more exotic forms of filmmaking? [*Fans are Slans*—TW]

BUZZ DIXON
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APO SF 96208

Congratulation on the birth of your daughter to both you and your wife,

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Buźz. (It seems like only yesterday my daughter was born; by the time you read this, she'll be 4½ years old. . .) In the interests of keeping the peace in this column, however, I suggest you herewith issue an apology for the use of the words "mincing fairy" and "fag" to Roger Klorese, who will undoubtedly point out that Dr. Smith was hardly a representative homosexual (if indeed he was one at all) and the use of derogatory terms to characterize his homosexuality if, etc.) was uncalled for.–TW

Dear Ted,

I have just picked up a copy of the September FANTASTIC, and after reading the letter column, I feel that I have to write this letter.

In regard to Eric Hackenberg's letter about *Star Trek*, I must disagree with his views about the show. And particularly about Vulcan physiology.

The point about Amanda being satisfied with the Vulcan mating cycle is irrelevant. Amanda loves her husband and knew what marrying a Vulcan would mean, and has adjusted, so to speak, herself to fit that cycle. Thus, she is quite satisfied with her husband and his culture.

On the point about Spock's hemoglobin, the terminology is partially inaccurate. While Dr. McCoy always said 'hemoglobin', the term is still inaccurate when applied to Vulcans. The term hemoglobin refers to blood in humans and other Earth-born creatures.

But even if it encompassed Vulcans as well, the Rh factor would not be a problem because of advanced medical techniques of that century, and also because of the fact that it is a natural condition for Spock. His blood is green and that is not because he has copper in his blood instead of iron, as stated in this letter, but because his blood is *based* on copper.

The distinction is slippery, but it must be made.

Thus, there is no basis for worrying about Spock's physical health because of blood disorders.

With regard to Star Trek in relation to other sf, let me state that I too, read other science fiction. I pick up one or two paperbacks whenever I go out, I read all the sf magazines, and I belong to the Science Fiction Book Club.

With that statement in mind, let me say that I do not consider *Star Trek* to be in the best in science fiction. That would be ridiculous. Trying to compare *Star Trek* to the *Foundation* Trilogy would be asinine.

However, trying to say that it is not sf is just as asinine. I suspect that the majority of people who do not classify *Star Trek* as sf also say that television writing is not really a form of literature.

I have a reply for those people, but I don't think it would make print.

All I say is that *Star Trek* is, perhaps, the most perfect form of *dramatic* science fiction ever to make it to tv.

And with regard to that last statement about Gene Roddenberry's comment, I think that while he may have said that, no where did he advocate it. All he said was that it would have to be simplified to reach a mass audience. He did not say that he would do it, just to keep the show on the air. And if you don't believe that, I suggest you check up on Mr. Roddenberry's battles with the network to have *Star Trek* done right.

And if you think that the animated version is just kiddie stuff, I suggest that you go back and view again Dorothy Fontana's 'Yesteryear'.

There. I've said all that I wanted to say about it. I've cooled off considerably now. I hope that this letter helps to clarify matters.

JOEL DAVIS
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Cranston, R.I. 02920

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Dear Ted:

You might pass on this note to Eric Hackenberg. (1) There are a few *Star Trek* fans who think about such questions as: how does Terrestrial DNA and Vulcan DNA-equivalent get together on a viable enzyme blueprint? But, aside from a xenobiochemistry paper, what can you do with it? (2) Any pioneer is going to make mistakes, and anyone who insists that there are no mistakes is not helping. It's a mark of *ST*'s quality that its most vigilent critics are among its most vehement fans. (3) Without demographic statistics, the fact that masses of people are ready to sit down in front of a single TV set will not help a show's ratings. If nothing else, the fate of *ST* forced a network exec to admit in print that viewer letters are insignificant in comparison to The Ratings. (*TV Guide* stopped printing accusations of viewer-apathy and well-why-don't-you-let-them-know? articles about then.) (4) Roddenbaby had two major reasons for lagging ten to fifteen years behind sf: (a) a TV program can't afford to march to a drummer that's *too* different, and (b) he wasn't aware of the existance of people familiar with the sf idiom(s) who can write within pre-existing Secondary Universes. He thought he had to choose between pros who would rather make their own worlds, and the regular stable of TV writers. (We will *not* mention Harlan Ellison in this context.)

Gossip Has It that *ST* was in effect sabotaged by the network. They bumped it from an early evening spot to the late-evening Friday spot that forced viewers to choose between *ST* and everything else they could be doing Friday night. Some chose *ST*, but without Roddenberry it wasn't often worth it. When the creator of a series leaves it, the series is in trouble. (Recall *Uncle* when Sam Rolfe left.) Roddenberry had said he would stay with *ST only* if it was given a timeslot appropriate for its audience. He couldn't back down.

LEE BURWASSER
3683 Severn Rd.
Cleveland, O., 44118

This all started in the April, 1972, issue of this magazine when I published a letter from Mark Stephenson, in which he took issue (at great length) with a paranthetical remark about Star Trek *I'd made in the course of reviewing a book on science fiction. Out of such small acorns the great oak of* Star Trek *letters, pro and con (mostly pro) has grown. Is there really more on this subject that needs to be said? Can we drop it and move on to something new? Like–why isn't Conan (or one of his heirs) on T.V. Heroic fantasy-adventure might be far better suited to television than sophisticated stf has turned out to be.–TW*

Fantasy Books (cont. from page 115)

Rankin. "He worked in charcoal and water color (and black grease pencil, I've been told—F.L.). There is a smirchy, dimly-revealed, haunting quality to his drawings that I have always admired above all the other of *WT*'s early artists. To me Hugh Rankin personified *Weird Tales*. I don't even exclude Bok and Finlay, great as they were."

—FRITZ LEIBER

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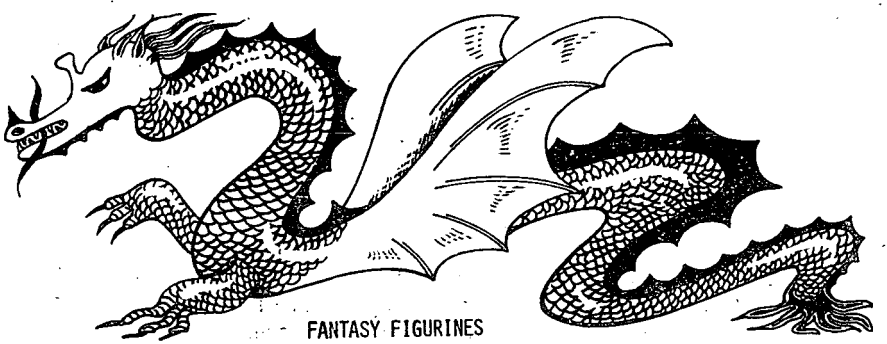

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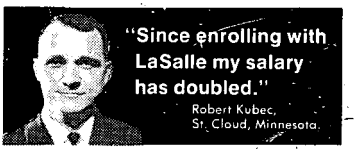

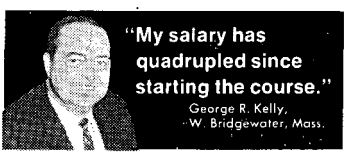

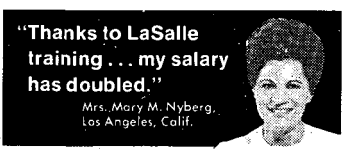

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